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# **The House in the Rain Forest**





# THE HOUSE in the RAIN FOREST

**CHARIS CROCKETT**

*with illustrations*

*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

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THE BELLE OF NUBUAI



# Introduction

BY EARNEST A. HOOTON

WHEN my colleague, Dr. Carleton S. Coon, told me that Charis Dennison had married Freddy Crockett and was going to New Guinea on a yacht to do anthropology, I did not enthuse. I made some grumpy comment about my lack of interest in blondes who go a-honeymooning among cannibals, even with bridegrooms who have accompanied Byrd to the Antarctic — those Playboys of the Southern World. Of course, my attitude was unfair and incorrect. Dr. Coon pointed out that this girl had taken a degree in Anthropology at Radcliffe, *Magna cum laude*, and was a better than ordinary risk. 'All right,' I said, 'you teach her to measure, and if she brings back anything more than malaria, I'll help her with her data.' I would not even lend her instruments. I told her to go buy her own and that if they came back not too rusty and bent, I would take them off her hands. (I have done so.)

It can be realized that I did not actively promote this expedition. But I am perfectly willing to take credit for the results, which are abundant and admirable beyond all (my) expectation. I knew that the girl was bright, but I now know also that she has courage, persistence, scientific ability, literary gifts, and a puckish sense of humor.

The present work is a casual by-product of her contributions to science. Actually, she measured nearly 900 greasy, smelly, filthy cannibals — a remarkable achievement for any tough, male physical anthropologist and a miracle for

a fragile, blonde female. On each savage she did a total of about 120 measurements or observations. As Winston Churchill would say: 'Some anthropologist . . . some female . . . some blonde!'

Mrs. Crockett's book is jammed with good descriptive writing, excellent anthropology, and real humor. I am appalled by the catholicity of her interest in and fondness for the animal kingdom. She had pets all the way from cockroaches to cockatoos. Perhaps that is why she even extends her zoological interest to that most pestiferous of all animals — man.

My recantation is complete — on female anthropologists, on cannibal honeymoons, and even on Byrd boys. (I now know that Freddy Crockett is not only an explorer, but also a gentleman and a scientist, adventurous but veracious.)

You ought to read this book. I have and I know it is good. Otherwise I would not have written this introduction

HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
*January 5, 1942*

# **The House in the Rain Forest**



# One

## To a dim green world

THE SUN rose every morning at six o'clock. This we felt to be so reliable, so considerate, and so correct that after the first week we never bothered to wind our watches. It doubled our obligation to it by setting every evening at what we also assumed to be six o'clock. Between these two points, if we were curious about the time, we stepped down our ladder into the blazing sunlight and walked along our shadows. A shadow two steps long meant two hours before or after noon, depending on whether the shadow fell to the east or to the west. Three steps, three hours, and so on. However, we rarely experimented along these lines. Why should we alone, among five hundred people, care what time it was?

Deep in the towering rain forest of north Netherland New Guinea, a very few miles south of the Equator, the time of the day, the day of the week, the month in the year, seemed equal matters of indifference. There were hours of light and hours of darkness, days of sunshine and days of rain. Fruits and gardens ripened and died, unhampered by a schedule of the seasons. There the ages have stood still; how could there be significance in a moment or the life-span of a man?

As the sun rose at six o'clock, so did we. At a quarter to six the great flat valley of the Warsamson was blanketed in cold white fog. It was this fog that huddled us at night

under warm covers, that laid over all our belongings an overcoat of thick green mould, that blotted out the faces of the moon and stars. But its unequal battle with the sun was quickly over. The first horizontal golden ray appeared to scorch those long white fingers, rapidly withdrawn. Here and there a wreath clung forlornly around the trunk of some great tree. In five minutes the fog was gone.

By the time we were sleepily imbibing our coffee, native life around us was well under way. The Papuan's day begins, not at sunrise, but at dawn. Dawn was formerly the time of danger; it was by the first streaks of light that the enemy aimed their spears, that the cannibal warriors carved up the human meat to carry home. For four years now the danger had been past, but the habit of early, fearful rousing still remained. Sleep could come again later in the safe, warm light of the sun. So men and women shouted greetings to us as they trudged towards the sago swamp, the men with spears on their shoulders, the women bent under the weight of heavy carrying-baskets or fat brown children slung on their backs. Perhaps in unconscious imitation Rebo, the tree-kangaroo, sat on the back of my chair, one paw around my neck, the other reaching hopefully towards a piece of toast. Freddy absently tried to wave Sanky — a very fresh young green parrot — off the butter dish. Sanky never actually ate much butter, but she loved to wade and play in it, stamping her little footprints up and down and excavating holes with her beak. Our other pet birds whistled and shouted, partly through sheer well-being, partly in answer to the morning greetings from their tree-dwelling friends. Those were beautiful early mornings. There was nothing to intrude on the serenity of sun and jungle, of warm, laughing voices and the songs of birds.

We dawdled over our coffee, knowing it to be our one



insurance of privacy. The removal of our breakfast dishes was the signal that we were then receiving — that the doors were thrown open to the hospital, to the trade store and to the laboratory, to the club and to the school. Whether it was innate mannerliness or the torture of envy they would undergo in watching us eat, the natives always absented themselves tactfully during our meals, and we were grateful for the respite.

The tempo of tropical life starts off at its top speed, gradually diminishing to almost a complete standstill as the sun reaches its zenith. Whatever your desires or plans might have been, at this time they succumb without a struggle to the soothing lethargy which somnolently envelops you. Only one sensation remains — acute hunger; and we would stare with glazed and heavy-lidded eyes towards the kitchen, muttering querulously to each other:

‘What on earth do you suppose is the matter with Martin?’

This would be the last exchange of remarks until the late afternoon. We had reached the comfortable animal stage where a meal is something to be eaten and nothing more.

We were never sure when we should have lunch, but there was no doubt about what we should eat. Unless Freddy had just shot something edible, we had canned corned beef and rice. Martin had two ways of cooking corned beef: one day he fried it, the next he made meat balls. Fresh vegetables were a rare luxury. We had bought some seeds at the Chinese store in Sorong and had planted a garden. The seeds were old and tired and mildewed, all but the cucumbers. Cucumbers blossomed and ran riot. We ate them three times a day, we presented them to the entire surrounding population, and still made no impression on the groaning vines. We became petulantly bored with cucumbers, but

once their era was over, we looked back on it with a yearning nostalgia. Once in a while we could cajole a vegetable or two from a meagre native garden. Often we ate, as the natives did, large crackly green leaves from some jungle tree, as unsatisfactory to masticate as a mouthful of cardboard. The rest of the time we ate little dried peas and vitamin tablets.

If you live on rice, we had discovered, you must eat a lot of it to get anywhere at all. For Martin and Evart, our two retainers, we allowed a pound apiece a day, for they ate it morning, noon, and night. Evart got fatter and fatter, and Martin retained his rail-like figure. Freddy and I ate it once a day and we got thinner and thinner. When we left Sainke Doek and I first saw myself in a full-sized mirror, it was an unpleasant shock. A skeleton loosely encased in a bag of malarial yellow skin stared back at me from hollow eyes. Topping it off was an irregularly hacked mop of moss-green hair.

'My God, Freddy!' I said in consternation. 'Why didn't you tell me I was mildewed?'

'Well,' said Freddy, surveying me critically, 'it must have crept up on you gradually. Now that you mention it, you certainly do look odd.'

Hastily averting my eyes from the depressing revelation, I turned to study Freddy.

'Not half so colourful,' I told him, 'but just as thin.'

In Sainke Doek we were happily oblivious of any peculiarities in our appearances, and our Papuan neighbours, having never before seen white people anyway, doubtless took additional green and yellow hues for granted.

Once we had eaten our own mid-day mounds of rice, we fed our impatient birds their portions and then rushed for our mosquito nets. We crawled under them in relief — re-

lief from the 'agas' or sandflies who reached their peak simultaneously with the sun, and relief from the general glare and dazzle of a New Guinea noon. Propped on our air mattresses in the semi-dark, we would indulge in the daily two-hour privilege of reading, with nothing and no one to interrupt. One of the luxuries of New Guinea that offset any amount of hardships was the great boon of time, gift of a timeless land.

In the cool of the afternoon we often strolled over to the village in search of excitement. Sainke Doek as a village was far from picturesque. The scars of freshly cleared land had not yet healed, and in the blazing and undiverted sunlight eight houses faced each other, only six of which could by any stretch of the imagination be described as completed. The population varied from day to day. Although the houses were not particularly large, there was room on the floor of each for twenty or thirty people to dispose themselves in slumber. Sometimes they were all filled to capacity; at other times not more than two or three people remained in the village. Everyone else had gone off somewhere on urgent business — to the swamp to pound sago, to the next village to collect a debt, to clear a garden in some fertile spot, or to move around the forest dodging pain or illness.

The Papuans of our district were really nomads. Their feet itched for the jungle trails. Their interests were spread over a broad area, from ripening corn in a distant garden to the wild lansa fruits in the highlands, from the sago swamp at Sainke Doek to a trading partner in distant Luelala, or a buxom beauty in southern Sejut. One day our staunchest friends would suddenly pack up and casually disappear on some private errand. Two or three weeks later they would be back again, full of tales of their adventures and the gossip from faraway places.

At six o'clock our time the sun set, trailing amber clouds in its wake. Then darkness rapidly closed in. From then on we were dependent on the one-candle-power kerosene lamps which decorate the shelves of every Chinese store in New Guinea, little narrow chimneys with reflecting screens at the back, paintings on tin of romantic rural scenes, wistful and indelible. Our first night in Sainke Doek we had had a Petromax pressure lamp which gave us brilliant illumination, but it must have felt itself an anachronism in its surroundings and refused to function any further. When Freddy investigated its insides, he exhumed the bodies of a number of cockroaches, but even their removal failed to effect a cure. So, huddled close to our wavering pin-points of light, we made no further struggle against the cavernous blackness around us.

The evenings we kept to ourselves, shooing away any late visitors at the arrival of our supper tray. Reading with our Chinese lighting was almost impossible, so we alternated chess and double solitaire. Freddy always suggested chess because he always won, so the following night, to bolster up my ego, I would insist on double Canfield. I realize that the intellectual levels of these two games are hardly comparable, but it was something I never admitted aloud. It was unnecessary to keep a score of the chess games, which were always a foregone conclusion, but we kept a tally of the solitaire in pencil on the table, for every once in a while Freddy would have a brief run of luck, which he was apt to exaggerate in his mind unless the cold facts could be demonstrated to him.

We became so absorbed in these games that we often sat up half the night over them. Occasionally, if the light fell on him, one of the birds would open an eye and give a sleepy trill, but generally they snuggled into their feathers,

oblivious of our presence. Rebo would sit on the back of my chair and peer over my shoulder for a while, but eventually she became bored and hopped off in search of entertainment. Hitching up one of the veranda posts to the roof, she would creep cautiously to the spot where Sanky's perch was attached and jerk at the line. Sanky would give a sleepy growl and I would clap my hands at the tree-kangaroo, explaining that sleep, even a bird's sleep, was a sacred thing. Rebo would switch her tail disgustedly and gallop off to explore the innermost recesses of the roof, finally settling down in some new siesta spot to nap until we called her to come to bed. I lit a cigarette from the lamp and stared dismally at the predicament of my chess-men, while around us in the dark the frogs croaked and the *Anopheles* mosquitoes hummed, impatient to bring us our daily quota of malaria.

There was one nocturnal visitation which inevitably routed us immediately to bed. On rainy nights — and they were far from rare — squadrons of flying termites, looking for warmth and comfort, wheeled towards our tiny lamp. In massed formation they would descend on our circle of light and within a few seconds our heads and arms, our table and chessboard, were entirely eclipsed under a crawling carpet of these persistent guests. We would shake them off as best we could and run for our nets, for we had learned by experience that termites, like an insomniac's sheep, followed each other endlessly through the night. The next morning we would find a drift of small brown petals around the lamp. Termites do not, like some less fortunate species, pay with their lives for the supreme and glorious gesture of rushing towards the light. Their wings they sacrifice and leave behind, but once the party is over, a wriggling, grub-like little creature creeps repentantly away.

At night the fireflies made a spectacular display. In a land where men and beasts, all extreme individualists, lead a solitary nomadic life, it was the fireflies alone who seemed to feel impelled to congregate, to live and shine surrounded by their fellows. At the edge of the clearing about our house stood an enormous Waringen tree, a sacred tree which, so the natives said, had grown from the umbilical cord of the ancestress of the Mialin clan. When darkness fell, this was one of the favourite firefly haunts. Thousands at a time they would settle in the topmost branches and proceed to twinkle, not in the ordinary haphazard way of their kind, but with perfect unison and synchronization, now off, now on. The effect was entirely magical, like some Christmas tree bewitched to pulsate through the night. The first evening we saw this we almost believed that the spirit of Ngon-Mialin must, exactly as we had been told, continue to guard her sacred spot. But finally we noticed another tree outlined in a glow of light, sinking into darkness, then again phosphorescent, and were forced to relegate the spirits once more to an invisible world.

There were other denizens of the night. Once the cold and heavy-handed fog had rolled over us, shoving furtive fingers into the innermost recesses of our house, the night sounds began. The stamp and scamper of the rats were mingled with the noisy explorations of Rebo. Native dogs sneaked into the house and made off with leather boots to chew or tore cigarettes hungrily to bits. Cockroaches rustled as they ate earnestly and steadily through our clothes, our baskets, and our roof. The shrill song of the centipede punctuated the deep bass croak of giant frogs who inexplicably chose to lurk in our rafters. Why they should forsake the friendly swampland for this precarious aerial seat always mystified us. Sometimes they gathered

in such numbers and sang in such enthusiastic chorus that we had to shout in each other's ears to make ourselves heard. Occasionally, with a resounding slap, one fell off his perch and sat, staring blankly, breathing heavily, on the table or the floor. To our relief, although they frequently grazed a water glass or a lamp, they never succeeded in making a direct hit. Above our private clamour the owlsh, mournful cry of the jungle-throated nightjar echoed around us. As the night wore on, mosquitoes hung greedily about our nets in regiments, making the dawn hideous with their shrill concerted hum. Presently the noises of the night were stilled. The 'burung siang,' which means in Malay 'the bird of the morning,' cried to all who listened that day had begun.

\* \* \* \*

The even tenor of our days seemed to us the most natural and normal of routines. Doubtless in some previous existence our lives had been conducted differently, but the remembrance was hazy and remote and there was nothing in our surroundings to recall it to our minds. We were divided from our own 'civilization,' not only by twelve thousand miles of distance, but also by many months of time. Long before we ever arrived in Sainke Doek, we had grown accustomed to the damp and blanketing warmth of the tropics, to brown faces rather than white ones, to a minimum of necessities, and to the easy habit of letting tomorrow look after itself. We had, after all, been a long time on the way to Sainke Doek.

When I was very young, someone once told me that, if you wanted anything badly enough, the chances were that you would get it. At the time I contemptuously considered this one more misguided adult aphorism. How many things

had I not urgently desired, from immediate metamorphosis into the opposite sex to a grown-up's pillow at night, and what good had it done me? But, however sceptical one may be of its fulfilment, the wish itself remains. It was rather later in life that a new wish obsessed me. For several years it appeared about as likely to come true as my earlier passionate prayer, but there seemed no harm in permitting it to exist inside me, discommoding no one but myself. Quite why the insatiable longing to go to New Guinea possessed me I often found difficult to explain. There were certainly several contributing causes. My father had visited there early in the century and had told us tales of cannibals that made our childish hair stand on end; in more recent years he had met, on a small Dutch freighter in the East Indies, an Austrian named Harry Kern who was having financial difficulties. In return for a series of loans, Mr. Kern deeded to my father two small coral islands planted to coconuts off the northwest tip of Netherland New Guinea, islands which none of us had ever seen and which had always roused our curiosity. In my anthropological studies New Guinea offered a field of investigation comparatively unexplored and of great interest. But I think that strongest of all was the feeling that the sort of life that would lead to New Guinea, not to mention working there, would be a very fine sort of life indeed, and that the best the world could offer in any other direction would be a poor substitute for this.

When Freddy and I were married, he seemed to take very kindly to the idea of New Guinea too. Perhaps he felt the subconscious need of balancing his two years in the Antarctic under Admiral Byrd with an equal length of time in the tropics. Perhaps I made such a nuisance of myself that everyone, Fate included, decided the simplest solution would be to grant me my wish.



The progress towards our goal was as exciting as its attainment. Never, in our wildest moments of optimism, had we dreamt that the same benevolent Providence which accorded us New Guinea would throw in gratuitously Tahiti and the Solomons, the Tuamotus and Fiji, and the whole blue expanse of the Pacific, which, even when quite by itself, was a completely satisfactory experience. In fact, it was often difficult to remember that our purpose was to reach Netherland New Guinea, so easy would it have been to drift unhurriedly from one Pacific island to another for the rest of our days.

We were fortunate in being sponsored by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. It was to the Academy that the birds collected were to be sent, the butterflies, fresh-water fish, and the botanical specimens that mouldered away before we could ever get them out of New Guinea; the anthropometric measurements, on the other hand, were to go to the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. With great wisdom the Academy armed us with numerous imposing documents covered with red ribbon and gold seal, which seemed to have a hypnotic effect on harbourmasters and other officials along the way; with even greater wisdom they appointed a friend of ours, Dillon Ripley, as official ornithologist to the expedition.

Seven of us tucked snugly into the *Chiva*, the fifty-nine-foot schooner which was to carry us from Gloucester, Massachusetts, to New Guinea. Diddy Lowndes, another friend, went along for the trip; George Adams joined us as captain and navigator, and two adventurous young men from Gloucester, Charlie Smith and Doane Nickerson, signed on as cook and sailor, respectively. There were times when we felt certain that we had exceeded the *Chiva's* maximum capacity, but eventually we mastered a sort of

dormouse technique of stowing ourselves away in very small places indeed. Besides our combined physical bulk, which got conveniently and inexplicably less and less, there had to be space for food and water, and all the medicines, tooth-paste, cameras, diving helmets, bird-skinning apparatus, guns, clothing, and odds and ends that each of us felt might have to last him or her indefinitely. Freddy had batteries of cameras, both moving and still, with which to photograph the natives; developing, printing, and enlarging apparatus, enormous quantities of film, and even greater quantities of preparations to keep the film from going the way of all else in the tropics. My charge was an endless assortment of bandages, splints, operating instruments the very sight of which made me quail, and a tin trunk full of bottles of medicine, boxes of pills, ointments, and salves, practically none of which bore the slightest relation to any disease or disability contracted on board.

I do not know that George Adams was entirely sanguine about the crew of the *Chiva*. Dillon Ripley and I had never sailed under so much as a pocket handkerchief before, and the fact that two of us were women probably increased the Captain's gloomy forebodings. But none of our catastrophes were nautical ones. Even the ocean seemed to make a special effort to be kind; our passage through the Caribbean was placid and, with the exception of one brief and sudden squall which in two seconds tore our jib to ribbons, the Pacific lived scrupulously up to its name.

Our first disaster occurred at Panama; the Diesel auxiliary had an inconvenient fit of temperament in the middle of the Canal. Our harassed pilot remarked grimly that the U.S.S. *Saratoga* had been child's play compared to the *Chiva*. Over the splutterings of the engine and the rushing sound of many waters his orders, ordinarily received with

a brisk 'Yes, sir' and instantaneous action, were greeted on the *Chiva* by ill-disciplined yells of 'What?' In despair he finally gave the command to hoist our sails rather than block the day's traffic. I believe ours was the only ship ever to sail through the Gatun Locks and Lake, a distinction which the authorities seemed to consider dubious.

For a month we were tied up to the dock in Balboa waiting for a vital Diesel part to arrive by airmail from New York. The *Chiva* rose and fell on the eighteen-foot tide with monotonous regularity while we lived the lives of goldfish in a bowl of very warm water, stared down at by the sailors on the giant ships which towered around us and by the usual curious idlers on the wharf. The heat made sleeping below out of the question, and we were able to stretch out at night on deck in the privacy of darkness, but when we waked in the hot, moist mornings our levées were better attended than those of any royal family. We grew not only bored, but querulous as well, easy victims to any sort of temptation that might arise.

Dillon was the first to fall from grace. One day he came on board with a parrot, a middling-sized green one named Joey. As Dillon feels about birds, so I feel about four-footed animals. Shortly after this self-indulgence on his part, I had my first meeting with the kinkajou or Panamanian 'honey bear,' a brown furry animal with a black tongue and a long prehensile tail. When a kinkajou sleeps, it curls into a round ball tied up with its own tail, its little pink-padded paws crossed defencelessly, and is altogether irresistible — that is, to anyone with my failing. The day before we were scheduled to leave Balboa, Dillon and I made a secret expedition to the zoo and examined kinkajous of assorted sizes and ages. The big ones were lethargic and fierce, the littlest ones exhaustingly active and fierce,

but we finally encountered a young adolescent that seemed amiably disposed towards us. She wrapped her tail in an affectionate stranglehold around my neck, wound her fingers in my hair, delicately removed one of my earrings with her teeth, and won my heart completely. We smuggled her surreptitiously on board the *Chiva*, where, since she was a nocturnal animal and the afternoon was hot and bright, she retired to sleep in the clothes hammock above my bunk. This aptitude for accommodating herself to her surroundings seemed to us to bode very well, and we decided to postpone any mention of her presence.

At that particular time we had for neighbours four submarines picketed in a row at our stern and a largish army tug looming over our bow. The full name of the latter, as we could read when we walked along the dock to her bows, was *The Lieutenant-Colonel Herman C. Schumm*. However, on her stern which she presented to our view some of the letters had been washed away or otherwise removed, leaving only the unusual diminutive of HERMA HUMM. We had stared for so many impatient hours at this name that it seemed only natural to present it to the kinkajou.

Herma Humm II introduced herself to the company on board the very first evening. Having completed her siesta, she emerged softly from the stateroom porthole, crept quietly along the deck to the Captain's glass of rum punch, lifted it in her very capable forepaws, and drained it to the dregs. Deplorable as such a gesture would have been in a human being, in a kinkajou it seemed rather endearing. Herma Humm was given a little more rum and made welcome aboard. Even when she presently showed definite signs of inebriation, everyone continued prepossessed in her favour. The ornithologist and I drew sighs of relief and decided that all was well. This decision turned out to have

been premature. The day that we sailed from Balboa she was still in a drunken stupor from the night before.

We wasted no emotion whatsoever on farewells to Panama, but settled down promptly and contentedly to the routine of life at sea. We 'dogged' our watches every day to avoid a mutiny from the twelve-to-four, the graveyard watch. The four-to-eight was naturally the favourite, including both the cool beauty of the sunset and of the dawn, the imperceptible and gracious merging into and from the quiet darkness, which included in its passing all the colours of the rainbow tossed from the water to the clouds and back again. The four-to-eight, however, meant only four hours till our turn came around again on the twelve-to-four. But if there were nothing else to be learnt on a boat, at least even the most sensitive neurasthenic would acquire the knowledge of how to eat and how to sleep. After a large breakfast and four or five cups of coffee, I could roll over on the deck and sleep, oblivious of any major manoeuvres, until noon.

At night even the twelve-to-four had charm. It was, of course, the only completely dark watch, and once I had gathered my faculties together and recovered from the anguish of rolling out of my bunk in the middle of the night, I fell completely under the spell of the black velvet sky studded with golden stars or the moonlight rippling on the swells. It seemed as though we were the only living things in the world, alone with the pulling sails, the creak of the rigging, and the slap of water against our sides. Occasionally porpoises would surround the ship, romping across the bow, snorting under the stern, invisible to us except for the streaks of phosphorescence in their wake which streamed like aquatic comets.

These sensations of peace and solitude on the night

watches were not, however, apparent until we had left Herma Humm behind in Tahiti. For Herma Humm drunk had been one thing; during the next six weeks Herma was sober and not beloved. Her activities became so destructive that during the day I kept her in the vegetable crate on deck. At night, for her exercise and recreation, she spent the watches with Freddy and me. No one else felt inclined to invite her to share his, and, to tell the truth, if anyone had, I should have mistrusted the offer. I didn't dare to let her loose, for there were two hazards: one that she would fall overboard, and the other that she would swing below and pounce on some ill-natured sleeping body. So I clung doggedly to the end of her hand-made leash, which she entangled in the wheel or the rigging in her determined attempts to climb the mast or run out on the main sheet.

From Panama we scudded southwest until we came to an abrupt halt in the doldrums that imprison in dark and motionless enchantment the sinister Galápagos. Here we flapped around for several days in a dead and very damp calm, with nothing to do except take rainwater baths and augment our water supply by catching gallons of the perpetual downpour in our sails.

At Saint Charles Island we became intimately acquainted with an Ecuadorian fishing family whose irresponsible cheeriness contrasted oddly with their gloomy environment. When we left, one of them presented to Dillon a young Galápagos tortoise, who was christened Eduardo in honour of the donor. Eduardo made the rest of the voyage to New Guinea with us, lived there in quiet sobriety for a few months, and was then transferred to his present residence in Connecticut. He was an excellent passenger, comparing favourably in his behaviour, I was often told, with Herma Humm. He chose his own quarters underneath the anchor

in the fore peak, where he disposed himself so inconspicuously as to give rise to panics that he was no longer on board. He emerged from here once every morning to make a patrol of the decks, slithering in zigzags from the gunwale to the cabin sides and back again. Only the persistence of his species could have triumphed over the break in the deck, which took him an interminable period to negotiate. From the cockpit we could see his head, white from encrusted spray and his oatmeal breakfast, peeping hopefully over the top and dropping back again and again.

Joey, the parrot, took an active interest in shipboard life. His wings were clipped, but he managed to travel wherever he pleased, up and down the rigging, along the boom. He spent contented hours perched on the life lines, the wind ruffling his feathers, peering like an ancient mariner at the distant horizon. He was infinitely curious and poked his beak into everything that went on: fortunately he never chose to bite with it. He waddled about the deck looking for a leg to climb, a knee to roost on, and a spot of conversation. He quickly learned the appropriate remarks to make to each different individual. Freddy at that time had a habit which Joey's persistence finally cured. Being an inattentive listener, he seemed to feel that if someone recounted an anecdote in his presence he could gracefully cover his preoccupation by a loud and hearty 'Oh really?' Whenever Freddy came up on deck, or Joey approached within hailing distance of him, Joey shouted 'Oh really?' in an excellent imitation of his voice and chortled caustically.

Most of all Joey enjoyed the taking of sights, and this especially when George Adams was wielding the sextant and Diddy Lowndes was below checking the chronometer. The words 'Stand by!' and 'Mark!' were always shrilly echoed by Joey as he hopped up and down in delight.

Early one afternoon we were most of us below sleeping when suddenly the bell in the cockpit clanged loudly. This herald of emergency had never sounded before and everyone rushed for the companionway.

‘Joey is overboard!’ someone shouted.

Behind us we could see a small green body bobbing in the waves. Poor Joey, it seemed, had walked out along the main sheet when no one was looking; a sudden gust of wind shook the sail and Joey had been flicked off. We came about as fast as we could with the strong following wind, trying to keep an eye on the pitiful, fluttering little green object which flashed into sight between the heavy swells. But by the time we got around, Joey had disappeared.

From the Galápagos to the Marquesas we were three weeks without sight of land, steadily pushed by the south-east trades filling our squaresail and raffee. Only the romping porpoises, the skimming, iridescent flying fish, and the dark shadows that were sharks lived with us in our world of sky and boat and ocean swell. The weight of our square yard and the following wind caused an endless, rhythmic rolling of the *Chiva* and her masts ticktocked through the sky with the inexorable cadence of a metronome. We must have developed some sort of suction powers that functioned even in our sleep to manage not to be thrown from our bunks. At first we used to ache in every muscle just from the effort of remaining stationary. But the peaceful routine of eat, sleep, watch, eat, watch, and sleep again, broken by dips off the bowsprit or splashes from the bosun’s chair safely out of reach of sharks; fair, steady winds and clear blue skies through which the phalanxed trade clouds marched, made any discomfort seem very slight indeed.

At last landfall — the Marquesas — majestic mountains brooding over deep valleys, tangled green slopes, and a



mournful, dying race. In the midst of the sublime tragedy of the Marquesas was a ridiculous irritation. One day while we were anchored in Typee Bay, Freddy and I decided to explore the hinterland. We took sandwiches with us and started up a trail which wound from valley to inland valley along rushing streams with views beautiful in the distance and near at hand. There were no villages, for the population of the Marquesas is sparse everywhere: we soon discovered why so few people lived in that particular and lovely region. It was the 'nonos.' Nonos are small black flies, much like the Maine variety in appearance and viciousness, and they descended on us in swarms. We must have looked like moving bunches of black atoms or the disintegrated dots that make up nebulae in astronomical illustrations. While we walked as fast as we could, they were endurable, but when the impulse moved us to consume our sandwiches, it was a different thing. We found an enchanting spot under the shade of large trees beside a stream and sat down, but only for a second. Besides being hungry, we were tired and averse to eating on the run, so we finally decided that if we submerged ourselves in water we might be left in peace. We sat in a large pool which came up to our necks and prepared to enjoy ourselves, but tiny shrimp nibbled at everything below the water line and the enraged nonos concentrated their activity with such violence on hands and necks and faces that we capitulated entirely, threw our sandwiches to the shrimp, and ran, dripping and demented, for the *Chiva*.

From the Marquesas we headed southward towards the hurricane-battered Tuamotus, a low-lying group of coral atolls, thin strips of land with waving coconut palms surrounding still lagoons. Freddy and I were on the four-to-eight morning watch as we supposedly approached the first

of these, Takaroa. Not a shadow of land could we see silhouetted against the dark night sky.

George Adams woke and prowled uneasily around the deck once or twice.

'We should be getting there,' he said. 'Where the flaming hell can that island be?'

'It gives no land, George,' I said soothingly. 'Go to sleep. Think how cross you'll be the rest of the day.'

He and Freddy went below and stared at the charts again. When Freddy came back on deck, we peered to the best of our ability, he in the stern and I in the bow. Even as it began to lighten there was nothing to be seen, but we suddenly heard a curious roar. In the direction of the roar a thin white line was presently visible. We stared incredulously as this resolved itself into a long stretch of breakers very close indeed to us, crashing against the Takaroa beach. Dimly another landmark could be seen, the iron hulk of a ship beached crazily on the jagged coral. I shivered. It would take less than a hurricane to get you into trouble here.

Even in broad daylight it was a ticklish business riding the rushing rip tide through the narrow opening into the lagoon while unintelligible instructions were shouted at us by the natives on shore and the captain of a Tahitian sailing schooner at anchor there.

Once we were tied up, I went below and grossly fell asleep. When I awoke, the Tahitian schooner and its distinguished old captain had sailed and all the local inhabitants had transferred their attentions to the *Chiva*. To have a year's quota of ships arrive all in one day must have been very disturbing to them. Our visitors were all unmistakably Tuamotuan except for two light-complexioned individuals who turned out to be Mormon missionaries

from Nebraska. The Chief, a fat, middle-aged, surly-looking man, announced that that evening, if we gave him some nice presents, he would give us a party. His English, thanks to his Mormon instructors, was adequate to make his point. The prospect of grass skirts and Polynesian rhythms offset the unattractiveness of his person and the crassness of his request. Regretfully we parted with some of our treasure to him.

As darkness fell, the whole village appeared to be in a hubbub of excitement. Some children came down to the shore and crooned Tahitian songs to us as we dressed up in our best. Herma Humm, intoxicated by the fragrance of night-blooming blossoms, ran excitedly up and down the furlled mainsail. We made our way to the assembly hall of Takaroa, a stone-floored building with a palm-leaf roof. There the Chief, dressed in a moderately clean white suit, formally greeted us. Presently the orchestra arrived, and at the sight of it our jaws and spirits dropped, for it consisted of four saxophones, two clarinets, and traps. As the strains of 'I Want to be Happy' blared brassily through the soft night air, the Chief bowed and requested Diddy for the pleasure of the dance. Not to be outdone, George bowed low in front of me and solemnly we stumbled and scraped over the stone blocks that were the floor. No one else presumed to dance. When the music finally came to an end, the Chief returned Diddy to our bench and bowed in front of me.

The chivalry of the men of the *Chiva* was short-lived. They intimated that the Chief might enjoy bouncing around with us on a bunch of jagged rocks, but they did not, and for a long period Diddy and I alternated as star performers with the Chief, stared at respectfully by the Tuamotuan audience, disrespectfully by that of the *Chiva*; to the attitude of the Mormon missionaries we received no clue.

Finally someone said impatiently to one of the missionaries: 'Don't they do any native dances here? How about the Hula?'

'Never, in the three years that I have been here,' the missionary replied, 'have I ever seen a Hula. I believe it is extinct.'

In a brief breathing-spell between dances the Chief was approached on the subject. He looked very displeased; obviously he disliked any insinuation that his people were not by now one hundred per cent civilized. Finally, however, his bargaining instinct triumphed.

'If you will do an entertainment for us,' he said, 'my people will do a Hula for you.'

As we were all desperate through ennui and Diddy and I had even further reason for wishing to change the course of events, we signified our acquiescence.

Immediately our bench was carried into the centre of the floor. George, by a fortunate chance, had his guitar with him. We sat solemnly in a row and delivered several tuneless sea chanties. Finally someone was inspired to suggest 'Old McDonald Had a Farm.' The quacking of the ducks, the mooing of the cows, and the highly artistic pig grunts with which we strove to compensate for our choral defects were a *succès fou*. (We heard, in fact, that a ship stopping at Takaroa some months later was flabbergasted at being greeted with this song.) The Tuamotuans whooped with delight and attempted to join in the chorus as they made us sing it again and again. Our hosts, we had discovered by then, needed prodding to fulfil their side of a bargain.

'Now it's your turn,' our spokesman said firmly.

The rival team brought out another bench and put it opposite ours in the centre of the floor. The musicians exchanged their saxophones and clarinets for guitars and an

accordion. Suddenly a long, gangling young man leapt up and started to dance. Not even in Tahiti did we ever see such a Hula again. Finally others got up and joined him. Perhaps only the release of a three-year ban could have lent such ecstatic abandon, such wild and savage rhythm to a smouldering, half-forgotten native dance.

The following morning we left, setting a course for Tahiti. We planned to be in Tahiti a few days, long enough to buy food and oil. Instead we were there for three months.

To Herma Humm, Tahiti was perfection. Poor Herma had really had rather a thin time on the *Chiva* — no liberty, no flowers, no appreciation. But in Tahiti she was the toast of the dance-halls. She set out on our first evening's exploration perched on my shoulder with her tail wrapped firmly around my neck. When I got up to dance, I left her leashed to my chair. The music stopped and I returned to the table to find Herma gone. It was some time before my agitated search led me in the right direction, for there was a tremendous crowd obscuring the bar. When I had pushed through it, I saw that on top of the bar sat Herma, three leis draped around her neck, drinking a rum punch. As soon as she emptied her glass, money clattered from all sides onto the bar to buy her another. From then on Herma became public property, a ward of the island. My feeble efforts at reform were unavailing, but I must admit her capacity for rum was magnificent and it seemed to do her no harm. Whenever the rum gave out, she would start eating flowers, her own (she was always bunched) or anyone else's within reach. Because she was happy she became more tolerant of humankind, and seldom bit except in fun.

On nights that we didn't go out, she was more of a problem, getting her exercise by running around the walls of our hotel cottage, jumping on the furniture, and bouncing on

the beds. When we felt inclined to sleep, we locked her in the bathroom, whence we could hear ominous clatterings the night through. In the morning I let her back into the bedroom to seek out some dark and secluded spot for her day's sleep.

The day finally dawned when I knew I must give Herma away to two of her most ardent admirers. Freddy got up first that morning and went into the bathroom to shower and shave. As this part of a gentleman's toilet seems to take an interminable time, I decided I had another nice long sleep ahead of me. Two seconds later the bathroom door slammed behind Freddy's exit; he stalked through the room and out.

'What's the matter? Where are you going?' I called after him, and to my surprise received no answer.

With a sense of foreboding I went into the bathroom. The shower curtain was down, the window-shade was down, and the roll of toilet paper had been entirely unwound. (We had gone to bed early that night and Herma Humm had obviously been bored and resentful.) How she had managed to open the medicine chest above the washbowl was a mystery, but she had. In the washbowl a riddled mass of shaving soap and brush, razor, toothbrushes, cold cream lay in a very gooey heap, and on top of this heap Herma Humm reposed, still hissing angrily from Freddy's intrusion. Sorrowfully I picked her up, rinsed off the shaving soap, toothpaste, and cold cream, cleaned up what was left of the bathroom, and carried her to her new home.

Each time that we were ready to leave Tahiti, something else happened. No sooner was the Diesel repaired than we discovered dry rot in the stern. Once the stern had been excavated and renovated, the engine had another relapse. Simultaneously Freddy's appendix had to be removed. It

was easy to tolerate these delays with philosophical resignation. Tahiti must be one of the most beautiful places in the world, one of the gayest and the friendliest. But the dark wings of tragedy also hover there, and when we sailed away from those cloud-swept peaks we left behind us one of our members, also one of the gayest and the friendliest.

From Tahiti, via American Samoa, we ploughed our way through heavy swells to Fiji, buffeted by gusty winds and soaked by rain. Boats draw a sharp distinction between salt water and fresh; they struggle loyally to keep out the ocean, but perversely welcome in the rain. On deck, of course, you expect the elements to have their way with you, but it's dismal to be forced to entertain them below as well. Rain drips down the back of your neck, collects in puddles on your mattress, spatters on your food. Closing ports or hatches only shuts out what air there is, leaving you damply engulfed in clouds of smoke and the strong, asphyxiating smell of mildew. In Pago-Pago and Suva, where we naturally wanted to show off an immaculate and tidy-looking ship, we had instead to litter the decks with wet mattresses and clothes and sails, unsuccessfully attempting to dry them out between the tropical downpours. We felt like ants scurrying up and down their holes, forever wrestling with the same old loads.

Pago-Pago was rainy, but Suva, metropolis of the Fiji Islands, was rainier. Nothing was ever quite so contrary to my expectations as Suva. Having read and heard of the fierce Fijian cannibals and their formidable ruler, King Thackembau, I gaped in astonishment at the bustling Australian city. For city life we were quite unprepared. Men may — in fact they did — manage to emerge from a small, wet boat looking the equal in elegance to anyone else on the street, but not so women. By the time we reached

Tahiti, each of us had lost approximately twenty pounds, an amount that physically we could well spare, but not sartorially. There were Chinese tailors in Papeete, but the fidelity with which they copy any given garment has not been exaggerated. In tucks and pinches and even missing buttons our new and supposedly fitted wardrobes were exact duplicates of the originals, except, of course, for the material, which was inferior. From Tahiti to Suva we went on shrinking so that when Diddy Lowndes and I struggled into our unaccustomed dresses to go ashore, we found them once again much too wide and much too long, squashed into damp wrinkles, perfumed with mould, and hanging in damp scallops around our bare legs. By the time we had teetered up a board in the rain in such a costume, the last vestige of self-confidence had oozed out the toes of our shapeless Tahitian sandals.

Besides this, we had all become rather shy. When you have lived for months in a private microcosm, seeing faces which, waking or sleeping, smiling or angry, are completely familiar, which talk to you if they feel like it and tell you to go away if they don't; when you have each learned to respect another's privacy and at the same time to place no value on your own, you find you have developed a sort of compound hermit psychology. The thought of being suddenly plunged into a world of strangers and social problems, of rush and business and hurry, the buying of stores, presenting of letters, and other normal human contacts, filled me with utter panic. I didn't want to go ashore — I wanted to hide on board.

Of course there were ports and ports. The lagoons of the Tuamotus, the harbours of the Marquesas, the curved beaches of the Solomons, were not intimidating. Natives, black or brown, would swarm on board, but as we had no



means of communication, we needed only to sit and stare admiringly at each other. They would bring us presents and we would return to them gifts which had been showered on us at the last place, a system economical of space as well as money. To George Adams and his guitar fell the chief burden of entertaining our guests, who invariably retaliated with songs and dances of their own. If we got bored with our new friends or wanted to go to bed, all we had to do was to make polite shooing motions. It was a very different matter from having bishops and their wives to tea on board in Suva.

After the sweeping dramatic peaks of the Marquesas and Societies, the islands of the ferocious Melanesians appeared from a distance dull and lowly. But the smaller Solomon Islands, with their green jungle foliage through which squawking cockatoos and brilliant butterflies flapped and sailed, their white sandy beaches where the megapods buried their eggs, seemed cosy and friendly after the majestic melancholy and breath-taking beauty of the volcanic stalagmites of Polynesia. We stopped for a few days at a little coral island ruled by a native princess and her German husband. They came one evening to dine on board and the princess dressed up for the occasion in the pounds of shell money she had inherited from her royal ancestors, yards of necklaces of tiny shells, shell plugs in her ears, and a nose-piece from which shell pendants dangled on either side. Her golden hair, she told us, was no longer acquired by the ancient method of lime bleaching, for now the Solomon Island traders do a brisk business in bottles of peroxide.

Next to this small island was another one called Oa Riki. Natives in little canoes paddled out to guide us to an anchorage. By the time we had rowed ashore a large reception committee was assembled on the beach. Not one of

them, man or woman, wore one stitch of clothes. The men, armed with their spears, looked unfriendly and surly, and it was with some misgivings that Diddy and I saw them surround the men from the *Chiva*, leading them firmly off down the beach. We were starting to trail forlornly along behind them when a wizened little old woman came running up and clutched each of us by a hand.

‘My name Chloe,’ she said. ‘Hello.’

‘Hello,’ we said, staring down at her.

‘You come path belong Mary to village,’ she said firmly. ‘They,’ pointing at the men, ‘go other way.’

Still holding our hands as though we, towering above her, were recalcitrant children, the little figure clad only in its own wrinkles walked between us towards the trail. In pidjin English she regaled us with her past history. She had spent two years ‘in service’ in Sydney, which accounted for her linguistic versatility, and the mental images conjured up by this tale made us strain to keep our faces straight.

When we reached the village by the ladies’ entrance we discovered, to our relief, that the men had been safely delivered there too. We sat down on the railing of a veranda and were introduced. The men all poked the men and the women all poked us and then draped themselves affectionately about us. I suppose the clothes looked so curious to all but the sophisticated Chloe that they demanded proof that actual human beings existed inside of them. We were moderately flattered by these demonstrations, though they were by no means an unmitigated pleasure. But to me they were useful, at least. If the inhabitants of Oa Riki felt free to poke and prod at us they could hardly resent my returning the compliment, and I arranged to do my first series of anthropometric measurements on them while everyone seemed in the mood.

Measuring unsuspecting and unwashed native peoples has both its amusing and its repulsive aspects. Practising on victims on board the *Chiva* had accustomed me to the expressions of distaste, embarrassment, and downright fright that the subject invariably assumed during different stages of the process. But at least my shipmates on the *Chiva* were more or less convinced that my intentions were friendly and would stop this side of homicide. A startled Solomon Islander or New Guinea Papuan had no such assurance to assist him through the ordeal, and my intimate probings of his bony structure, investigations of the complexities of his profile and the cavities of his teeth terrified him to the point of paralysis — fortunately, or in every case I'm certain he would have wriggled away and run for cover.

The purpose of these anthropometric measurements is the establishment of various physical types. The more generalized characteristics of the inhabitants of any one locality can be determined, the resemblances to and differences from their near and remote neighbours, the ideal being to discover the various strains which are there combined. In anthropology there is as much information to be gathered from these physical measurements as from the study of social habits and customs.

The Governor of the Solomons was very kind to us, and because we had been good and not trespassed on forbidden ground, he permitted us to visit Ontong Java, supposedly the largest coral atoll in the world. Certainly it took us one whole day to sail the length of the lagoon. The lagoon was far more beautiful than the inhabitants, who, though of predominantly Polynesian blood, exhibited little Polynesian charm in their sullen faces, surly manners, and scaly skins. We much preferred to their company dangling over the side of the dory staring down through the pellucid water at the

submarine cities of brilliant coral, where fishes of every colour of the rainbow whisked in and out or hung motionless in suspended animation.

From Ontong Java we headed for Rabaul, capital of Australian New Guinea in spite of the fact that it is on the island of New Britain. This choice of a situation had recently proved to be not entirely fortunate, for shortly before our arrival occurred the Great Eruption which blew the top off one mountain, buried the town under pumice, and left several ominously puffing craters around the town. The most astonishing manifestation took place in the harbour, where, in certain currents, all the pumice which had been spewed into the ocean was sucked back there again, floating six inches deep over all the water and making the boats look as though they were imbedded in dry land. It was in this condition the day we arrived, and as we stared from the chart to the harbour and back again we were forced to believe that the entire floor of the ocean had risen. This was startling enough, but when we saw a boat chugging slowly and without any wake towards us, the only explanation seemed to be that we had sailed through the looking-glass.

We were quite a time in Rabaul while the *Chiva's* bottom was painted for the last time. We found a kind friend who let us take hot baths in his house, always the height of hospitality to boat-dwellers, and others who invited us to live aboard their freighter while the *Chiva* was in dry dock. But we were impatient to get on, with New Guinea so close to us. Finally, scrubbed and painted, weighted down with supplies, we were off on our last lap.

We skirted the coast of the long length of northern New Guinea, past low and swampy shores and mountainous ones, past the yellow muddy waters where the great Sepik River sluggishly mingles with the sea. No longer were we tempted

to stop by the way; suddenly, after all these months, we felt we must hurry on — to Sorong on the northwestern tip of the Netherland half of the island.

One night we were scudding under a bare strip of canvas with a strong following wind. I began to shiver with cold.

‘I’m going below to get a coat,’ I said. ‘I’m freezing.’

‘So am I,’ said Dillon. ‘This isn’t what I expected of New Guinea. I wonder what the temperature is.’

Being of a methodical and scientific mind, he went below and brought the thermometer up on deck. We watched with interest to see how low the mercury would drop. It was exactly 79 degrees. We were ready for New Guinea.

# Two

## Island of survivals

IN NEW GUINEA the curtain rolls back for thousands of years. It takes only a few days of living among the towering great trees of the Rain Forest hung with orchids and giant lianas, among the shy, dark-skinned cannibal peoples, to forget that such things ever existed as the thunder of traffic, the ticking of clocks, the comforts and hurry of civilized life. Magically one is transported back from the twentieth century to the time when man hunted his food with a bow and arrow, when he roamed the forest living on nuts and fruits, when he slept in flimsy shelters and ate his fellow man. Like the delicate tracery in a limestone cliff of some Silurian trilobite, the existence of the New Guinea Papuan is a survival into modern times of an early form of life, a dim daguerreotype of our remotest ancestors. New Guinea, like its neighbour Australia, was cut off from the continent of Asia at an early age, and together they form a cul-de-sac in which still exist primitive forms of life that elsewhere are extinct: the egg-laying duck-billed platypus of Australia, the little pouched marsupials of New Guinea, the nomadic culture of the Australian bushman and the New Guinea Papuan. Along the coast of Netherland New Guinea there are a few marks left by itinerant peoples, but, forbidding in its swamps, its tangled forests and mountain ranges, its cannibalistic tribes, the hinterland has held no lure for passers-by, no vision of a promised land. Even now it still

throws down the gauntlet of the last frontier; its snow-topped mountains, broad valleys, and upland plateaus continue to guard their age-old secrets from the inquisitive European. So the Papuan lives, as he always lived, deep in his own Stone Age.

The inhabitants of New Guinea obligingly manage to look as though they belonged in some remote geologic era. By no stretch of the most kindly imagination could they be called a handsome race. Of course there is considerable variety among them, but as a group they create an impression of incompleteness, as though they had been turned out in a hurry without any of the proper finishing touches. Half of their features, for instance, are grossly exaggerated and the rest have been obviously skimped. Their temples are narrow and pinched, and in some cases their chins appear to have been forgotten entirely. Their noses, on the other hand, are enormous, flaring, and often hooked in a manner more reminiscent of an able financier than a naked jungle dweller, and their prognathous gums and buck teeth project snout-ishly between the thick flesh of their redundant lips. Unlike the negroes of Africa, many Papuans grow luxuriant but ill-trimmed beards which add to their general uncouthness. Their brown bodies are frail and not sculpturesque, bulging both forward and aft — the former from their ill-balanced diet and malarially bloated spleens, the latter from inherent mild steatopygia.

These queer little people have a reputation for the utmost ferocity. There is no doubt that in parts of New Guinea this is well deserved, but we found it difficult to suspect the tribes among whom we lived of anything more barbarous than a tendency to kill and eat people who didn't behave according to their standards. I suppose some people might interpret even this as ferocity.

New Guinea is the second largest island in the world. It is not a compact land mass as is its successful rival, Greenland, but perches on the Cape York Peninsula of Australia like an elongated bird. Its shape and size are not its only provocative features; it has also the distinction of being the point where Oceania meets the Orient. To the east stretch the islands of Melanesia, from Fiji to the Solomons, inhabited by black-skinned, frizzy-haired, canoe-building peoples. To the west lies the Malay Archipelago, whose broad-faced, straight-haired inhabitants gradually reach their peak in the civilizations of Java and Bali. Northwest the straggling Philippines reach out trailing fingers towards Borneo; almost due north are the Japanese-mandated islands of Palau, and Japanese boats sometimes put in and out of Manokwari, uneasiness following in their wake, for there are a few mysterious Japanese colonies on the New Guinea coast about which strange rumours are heard. New Guinea's preponderant population differs from most of these neighbours, is frowned upon by them as an inferior race, and is feared because it is still largely unsubjugated.

As New Guinea is the dividing line between native peoples, so it is also the demarcation point between two great sovereignties: the British control the islands to the east; the Netherland East Indian Government those to the west. New Guinea, to make everything fair and square, has been neatly bisected down the middle. The western half is Netherland New Guinea, the eastern half at present British. But the eastern half is subdivided again by a horizontal line. The southern half is the British 'Territory of Papua'; the northern, which was formerly German Kaiser Wilhelmsland, is now administered under Australian mandate. The entire British half has been far more explored and exploited than the Dutch. It is in the Australian mandate that the spec-



tacular system of flying machinery into and bullion out from the rich interior gold fields has been developed, a triumph of man over the barriers of jungle and other men.

Strangely enough, without your own boat there is no communication between British and Netherland New Guinea except for an occasional native canoe. One must be approached from Australia, the other via Makassar, but as very few people approach either of them, this makes little difference. You must also make up your mind in advance as to whether your destination shall be the north or the south coast of Netherland New Guinea, for the only way to get from one to the other is to take the monthly boat west to Ambon and start all over again. The south coast is largely a lowland region of steaming mangrove swamps, whereas the north coast, which practically bumps its head on the Equator, is in most places a line of rocks and beaches behind which steep green mountains rise. Fortunately for us, it was there that we had our contacts, and consequently there that we went. Although we poked back and forth the entire length of this coast and into the islands of Geelvink Bay, to us the most familiar part was its western section. Here the head of the long ungainly bird, with Sorong sitting on its forehead, stares open-mouthed at the Moluccas, and the Dutch have appropriately christened it the Vogelkopf. It was here that Sainke Doek, our home for eight months, lay tucked back in a valley two days' march from the sea.

Netherland New Guinea has only been administered directly by the Netherland East Indian Government for the last thirty-five years. Before that the Dutch claim to it was roundabout, for part of Northwest New Guinea and its outlying islands were under the nominal suzerainty of the Sultan of Tidore, who was, in turn, under the nominal suzerainty of the Dutch. The mainland of New Guinea was

only looked upon at that time as a source of exotic tribute — dammar resin, tortoise shell, and especially the beautiful and unique birds of paradise which only emerged as native-cured skins. Like the many that we saw, these consisted chiefly of a mass of plumage, the skulls having been removed, the legs and some of the wings cut off, and a stick run through the body. For this reason extraordinary legends took shape around them — these birds of incredible beauty with no legs to stand on and no wings with which to fly.

The administration of Netherland New Guinea is an admirable example of justice tempered by benevolence. It has so far occupied itself entirely with the pacification and welfare of the natives; in exchange for effort, money, and courage all that has been withdrawn is malaria and death. The Dutch laws are designed for the protection of the Papuans not only from one another, but also from anyone else. Anyone in the Netherland East Indies striking a native is heavily fined for the first offence; for the second he goes to jail. Whenever cases come to 'court' in New Guinea, a council of native chiefs and headmen sits in judgment with the Dutch magistrate, deciding with him on the guilt or innocence of the accused, according to their own ideas and customs. The magistrates realize that the code of the bush Papuan bears little resemblance to the Roman or the Napoleonic, that what we might consider wanton murder is often done under the guise of justifiable revenge or the invocation of a legal penalty. The courts aim, therefore, rather at the prevention of future crimes than at the severe and incomprehensible punishment of past ones, and in this purpose they succeed admirably.

Besides the theoretical plan of government, we were deeply impressed by its practical application in the persons

of its administrators. The handful of men who controlled the north coast were just, intelligent, and courageous. Almost more important, they all possessed the sympathetic gift of humour that lent to their relations with the Papuans mutual understanding and enjoyment.

The Dutch administrators are arranged in a hierarchy. The highest position in New Guinea is that of Assistant Resident, and there are two of these, one for the south coast and one for the north. To them the local 'contrôleurs' and 'gezaghebbers' are responsible. 'Local' is used here in a purely relative sense, for in all the northern area there are only five of these magistrates. As the coast line is some six hundred miles long, as there are several large and populous islands in Geelvink Bay, and as the frontier is being pushed steadily farther and farther inland, these five men have plenty to occupy them. Our friend Mr. van der Goot of Sorong had some four to five thousand square miles under his jurisdiction. In this area he was responsible for keeping peace and order wherever it had previously been established, as well as opening up new territory, making friendly contacts with hitherto unknown tribes, building trails, clearing village sites, settling disputes, anticipating raids. Part of his time was spent in Sorong attending to administrative details, holding court and administering justice, receiving and sending reports; the rest of the time he was absent on long patrols all over his domain. When news came of a raid, a murder, a case of cannibalism, he set out with his little band of field police to track the culprits down. Cutting their way through unmapped jungle, travelling fast and light, subsisting on only such food as they could carry with them, frequently ambushed by savage tribes, they eventually caught every miscreant. For one anti-social deed to go unpunished or unrebuked would not only undermine the

government's prestige, but shatter the confidence and security of the natives as well. And so it never happens.

Once the controlleur or gezaghebber considers an area fairly safe a Bestuer Assistant is sent there to establish villages, make patrols throughout the neighbourhood, and keep things in order under the careful supervision of his superior. These, like the missionary teachers and a large proportion of the police, are largely men recruited from the little island of Amboina and the contiguous parts of Ceram. Most of them come from sections that have been Christianized and, in their own eyes, highly civilized, for the last three centuries. Lower than the Bestuer Assistants are aspirant or unfledged native magistrates, and under them the police — a hodgepodge of reformed Papuans and other East Indies natives.

Netherland New Guinea is not in any way a sophisticated spot. With the whole of the beautiful Netherland East Indies to choose from, the Dutch do not come to New Guinea unless they must. As there is no industry, no mining, no agriculture, the only ones who have to come are the handful of government officials. So in each of the five or six tiny seats of government on the north coast there is one European inhabitant — the magistrate or controlleur — a score or more of Ambonese, and a few Chinese. The Chinese are the merchants of New Guinea. They trade with the natives for dammar and occasional coconuts and they supply the foreigners with rice and canned food. The merchandise in each of these Chinese 'tokos' is identical — a few pots and dishes, some cans of food, bottles of beer, cheap striped shorts, singlets, sarongs, red G-strings, and little kerosene lamps. The towns are pretty, though not pretentious. There is a profusion of shade trees and hibiscus, sweet-smelling flowering vines smother the flimsy tin-roofed shacks, and neat little sanded paths amble between them.

Sorong is typical of these government stations. It is on a minute coral island about a mile in circumference with the lugubrious title of Doom. The effect of its name is rather spoiled by the Dutch pronunciation, which fails to accent its full tragic value. Doom Island has its 'gunung' or mountain, which rises in the centre all of eighty feet high. On this is situated the radio station. The northern side of the island is totally uninhabited, save for coconut palms and a few sporadic graves watched over by fragrant frangipani. The southern side faces the mainland across a broad and sometimes unnavigable stretch of blue-green water. Here there is a main drag, for pedestrian traffic only, lined on either side with identical Chinese trade stores. One of these, Ong Tjoean's, had an icebox, and there we could elevate the sordid problems of marketing and commerce into a festive occasion by drinking cold beer with the proprietor and his plump and favourite wife.

The rest of Sorong consists of some Ambonese shanties to house the government clerks and minor officials, some natives living in their canoes on the shore, the Kantoor, or office, and the white stucco residence of the Dutch magistrate. There is also a tennis court and a parade ground on which the 'Army' of twenty men recruited from Java, Amboina, or Ternate drill and wave their sabres menacingly at each other every morning. The Pasangrahan (rest-house is not an appropriate name for it) is a cement-floored building furnished according to the taste and equipment of its rare occupants.

Manokwari, the capital of the north coast, was somewhat different. It straggled up a steep hill from a picturesque horseshoe bay encircled by a ring of mountains. There were many more identical Chinese stores there, several houses for resident Dutch officials, and one horse which cavorted

playfully around the back yards — too unique an importation to think of pressing into service. The horse and the profusion of flowers were the two things that most astonished the tribes of little mountain people when they came to town. The horse they ran from in hysterical terror; the flowers they plucked from people's gardens and stuck in their hair.

Perhaps you have observed that I have made no mention of banks. Our first stop in Netherland New Guinea was at Manokwari. With what seemed to us commendable foresight, we had started from New York eleven months before with ten Dutch guilders. During the voyage they had dwindled mysteriously to five, the rest undoubtedly having found their way into the bilge. No sooner had we dropped anchor in the harbour than a small boat rowed out to us and an Ambonese inquired if we had any laundry. We replied in an enthusiastic affirmative, having last had clean clothes at Rabaul. We tossed overboard everything we owned except what we stood up in, told him to hurry as we were leaving early the next morning, and went ashore. It was hot, we were thirsty, and the first Chinese store we entered had cold beer. We quenched our thirst liberally, and while I pored over the shelves, making a list of stores for the trip to Sorong, Freddy produced one of our Dutch guilders to pay for the beer. The Chinese shook his head violently, fished an East Indian guilder out of his pocket and demonstrated the noticeable difference between the two. We were surprised but not nonplussed.

'Very well,' Freddy and George Adams said with dignity. 'We'll go to the bank. Back in a jiffy.'

There was no bank.

Freddy went to call on the Assistant Resident. He was away for two days on his boat. In broken Malay we pled

for acceptance of our travellers' cheques at the Chinese stores. The Chinese shook their heads, too crafty to give good money for meaningless pieces of paper. We went bleakly back to the *Chiva* and sat. No food, no beer. Temporarily we had forgotten our clothes. That evening the laundry man arrived with a boatload of spotless garments and a bill. When it dawned on him that the bill was not to be paid, he shouted orders to the man in his rowboat and sat down in the stern. The man rowed ashore and returned presently with two sleeping-mats and some cooking-pots. He, too, climbed on board and he and the laundry man spread out their beds, lighted cigarettes, and settled down to live with us. They were disagreeable men, and we eyed them with even deeper disfavour than they evinced for us, but we were powerless to dislodge them for the next two days while we waited hopefully for the Assistant Resident to return.

When Mr. Beets arrived he looked dubiously at our travellers' cheques and letter of credit. It was not an auspicious introduction to the governor of the north coast to dun him for hard cash. Mr. Beets was, as we discovered overwhelmingly later on, a very kind man. This time he declined to get tangled up with non-negotiable cheques, but he loaned us thirty guilders. We thanked him profusely, bought our supplies, and with vicious relief secured the withdrawal of the laundry man. When we reached Sorong four days later we borrowed thirty guilders from Mr. van der Goot, the magistrate there, and sent them to Mr. Beets. Then we borrowed thirty guilders from a Chinese trader and paid back Mr. van der Goot. The Chinese are gamblers. We invited Ong Tjoean, the merchant prince of Sorong, his two wives, three brothers-in-law, and eleven assorted children onto the *Chiva*, plied him with his own borrowed beer, and explained that we would send our letter of credit on the

next monthly boat to Makassar. The following month the boat would bring us back some money. Ong Tjoean decided he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb and permitted us to rifle his store. It is, therefore, not surprising that from then on we patronized him exclusively, although he was considerate enough to allow us each a little pocket money.

There is one peril of New Guinea — it is, in fact, common to the whole of the Dutch East Indies — which might never suggest itself to the casual traveller as a serious hazard. It had, however, an astonishing effect on two of our members. There is, as I have mentioned, a monthly boat to New Guinea, a Dutch freighter of the familiar K.P.M. (I will not attempt to go into its full name.) It is the life-line between Netherland New Guinea and the outside world, bringing food, mail, and an occasional passenger, almost invariably on government business. While we lay anchored off Sorong this boat, the *Van Imhoff*, arrived very early one morning. Five of us opened each a sleepy eye at the rattle of her anchor chain, rolled over, and went to sleep again. Diddy and Freddy, however, both had business to transact. Diddy wished to write and mail some letters on board the boat, and Freddy, not yet quite adjusted to New Guinea standards of living, thought that here might be an opportunity to cash an express cheque and look at some money again. They both dropped overboard into the dinghy and rowed out to the *Van Imhoff*. When Diddy and Freddy returned, about two hours later, we plied them with questions. What had they done on board, how was the boat, was the Captain nice?

Diddy's account was not particularly striking. She had sat down in the dining-saloon to catch up on her correspondence. A Javanese 'boy' had served her a tray of



coffee and hot milk, of which she had drunk considerably, and from then on she had waited for Freddy.

Freddy's story was slightly more colourful. He had announced to another Javanese in his best Malay that he wished to see the Captain. The Javanese boy had nodded comprehendingly and led him purposefully to a closed door. There was writing on the door, and though Freddy's Dutch was no better than his Malay he intuitively realized that the letters spelt out the Dutch equivalent of 'Men.' Finally he reached the anteroom to the Captain's cabin, where the Captain, having been on duty all night, was catching up on a little well-earned repose. Freddy's escort politely proffered to him, as to Diddy, a tray of coffee — cold — and some hot milk. Like Diddy, Freddy drank a great deal of this beverage while he waited. Subsequently he met the Captain briefly; the Captain proved very helpful (Freddy had guilders in his pockets), and Freddy and Diddy both rowed back to the *Chiva* as the *Van Imhoff* up-anchored.

Shortly thereafter Freddy lay down on an air mattress on deck and Diddy disappeared below. Some minor problem arose and I went and prodded Freddy, who, though his eyes were open, unaccountably gave an impression of being far, far away. While I laid the facts before him he stared drearily up at the boom above his head.

'Please go away and don't bother me,' he said when I had finished.

This reply to a simple, friendly gesture roused so many simultaneous emotions in me that I was really rendered speechless. I dealt with the minor problem to the best of my ability and then flounced down angrily to the stateroom. On her bunk Diddy lay staring into space with the same vacant expression that I had seen on Freddy.

'Freddy is behaving in the most extraordinary way —' I

started, and then looked at her more closely. 'What's the matter with you? Don't you feel well?' I asked.

'I feel all right,' said Diddy, never shifting her eyes, and in a tone that discouraged any further conversation.

In dismay I went up on deck again, where Freddy still lay like an animate mummy. By this time I was no longer angry, only deeply, deeply hurt. First my husband and then my friend had treated me as though I were something they emphatically did not want around. As the day wore on neither Freddy nor Diddy shifted their positions. They remained aloof, remote. Pride prevented me from approaching them again and the rest of the crew, having witnessed my double discomfiture, made no moves in their direction. We all tried to behave as though everything were quite as usual.

That evening we were to dine on shore with the van der Goots. As the time approached we mentioned the subject loudly so that both Diddy and Freddy could hear. This eventually produced some effect; first one and then the other got up, slowly and still in deep silence, and prepared to go ashore. As we walked towards the van der Goots' house I noticed that besides their staring eyes and their taciturnity they had still another trait in common: they wobbled.

After dinner we sat drinking coffee and Mrs. van der Goot happened to remark, 'I suppose our coffee essence is new to you?'

'No,' I said. 'I remember from the time I was in the Indies before. You pour a thimbleful of it in the bottom of your cup and mix it with hot water or hot milk.'

'What!' shouted both Diddy and Freddy simultaneously, sitting up straight in their chairs for the first time.

We all looked at them in surprise.

‘Of course,’ said Mrs. van der Goot. ‘The essence is strong enough to kill an ox.’

Finally the whole tale was pieced together. Thinking that the coffee with which they had been presented on the *Van Imhoff* was cold only by mistake, they had drunk three to four cups of it straight. They had, in other words, each absorbed an enormous dose of pure caffein. Both admitted that subsequently they had thought they were going crazy, since the mental as well as the physical symptoms were so extraordinary and so acute; this astonishing attack of insanity had been so frightening that neither had dared to admit his or her sensations. Nor had they thought of comparing notes with each other, which might perhaps have led to an explanation. It was three or four days before they recovered, but at least the nightmarish terror was gone.

In Sorong, besides Mr. and Mrs. van der Goot, we met Harry Kern, the Austrian who lived on the islands that he had deeded over to my father, and who piloted us from Sorong to them. Although the islands were very small they were still large enough for us to get used to using our legs on land again, and in general to wean ourselves from the carefree, childlike routine of life at sea which we had forgotten would ever have to come to an end. The first stage was over; we had reached New Guinea. Now we had to plan what we were going to do about it. Although we had approached New Guinea from the east, we had pushed steadily on to Sorong at its westernmost tip, for it was there that our headquarters were to be, our mail had been sent, our permits arranged. So it was there and at the islands that we made our plans for the distant and the immediate future.

Our chief reason for coming in the *Chiva* was to have a boat in which to cover the north coast and the islands of

Geelvink Bay to the east. Harry Kern produced two men to assist Dillon in hunting and skinning birds, and two more men as general factotums who were later to go into the interior with Freddy and me. These were Martin, a shy and frightened-looking Ambonese who was to become as essential to us as oxygen and food, and Evart, a fat black Papuan who looked as lazy as he was to prove himself. Once more we set out from Sorong to retrace our voyage back along the shore.

Fortunately we had no idea then that within the next three months our affection for the *Chiva* was going to dwindle almost to the vanishing point. This was only partly her fault. Instead of seven aboard we were now eleven. At sea this was not so bad. There we could keep comparatively out of one another's way. But a large part of the time was spent in ports, where everyone slept at the same time and was awake at the same time and consequently on top of everyone else. The southeast trades had been left far behind, and whenever a breeze happened to come up it invariably headed us. No more of the silent, pulling sails; we were dependent on the ornery Diesel auxiliary, which belched black smoke over all the deck and turned the galley and main cabin into an inferno of heat and oily soot. As though we were not already crowded enough, we kept picking up extra passengers from island to island and mainland to island — Papuans, Ambonese, sometimes Dutch. And we turned into what the Captain bitterly described as the 'Ménagerie Maritime.' From the main boom and every bit of rigging hung the perches of birds — lories and parrots, goatsuckers, cockatoos, and doves. A packing case on deck was transformed into the cage of a blue crowned pigeon as big as a turkey. The idiotic creature was too stupid to feed itself, and twice daily degrading scenes took place as

Dillon, with one of us to assist, rammed wet rice down its throat.

The four-footed beasts were, as usual, my fault. In Manokwari some of the mountain natives we were measuring one Sunday appeared with a young wallaby, an animal exactly resembling a kangaroo except in its size, which was blessedly smaller. With Herma Humm safely in the past I immediately purchased the creature for two and a half guilders. Mr. Beets, correctly surmising from this transaction that I was fond of animals, thereupon presented me with a tree-kangaroo, small enough to curl up in the palm of my hand. As I was casting about for names for my two new acquisitions Mr. Beets suggested the expedient employed by the ever-resourceful Robinson Crusoe.

‘You buy the wallaby on Sunday,’ he said. ‘Why not call her Minggo, Malay name for Sunday? Today is Wednesday that I give you the tree-kangaroo. Call her Rebo, Malay for Wednesday.’ So Minggo and Rebo they became.

On the *Chiva* Minggo thumped impatiently up and down the deck on her hind legs, making the pine planking sound like cowhide stretched across the top of a drum, and scattering Martin, Evart, and other courageous natives before her. Rebo pulled herself up and down the companionway during the daytime and in and out of people’s bunks at night. The deck was a litter of grains of rice and fruit pulp scattered about by the birds and piles of wilting leaves stacked here and there for the marsupials, though this, as anyone can imagine, was not the entire extent of their damage. The Captain, who was a tidy man and subject to the belief that a ship should be kept shipshape, would put his head in his hands and groan.

The feeding and maintenance of the menagerie was no

sinecure. At dawn the birds began to scream and continued to scream until they were fed. Whenever it rained, which was frequently, and often in the middle of the night, pandemonium broke loose as we tried to stow our charges in the few dry places on board. The birds pecked and bit in anger and excitement, Minggo darted between people's legs and tripped them up, the natives dived down the forward hatch for cover, and frenzy reigned until we all squeezed suddenly together below with our agitated livestock.

Still we might have maintained our equilibrium and tempers had it not been for a series of physical disasters. Charlie Smith started the ball rolling by developing our second case of appendicitis. Luckily a plane of the New Guinea Oil Company happened to be in port and flew him to the nearest hospital on the south coast. Then in Manokwari I contracted a disease that was even more humiliating than painful. Why I, who had had them before, should have been chosen as victim by the measles when five of the others had never had them once, was a bitter question to me. And why, after facing the perils of the deep and the profusion of exotic tropical complaints, I had to succumb to a school child's illness, was another one. With great magnanimity (especially since he had never had the measles) Mr. Beets offered his official residence as a hospital. The moment that Diddy, who nobly volunteered to look after me, and I had been installed, the house was quarantined and Diddy, looking out the window, announced that the *Chiva* was flying a yellow flag. Fortunately no one else developed any symptoms and the *Chiva* was finally allowed to depart for Biak, where Dillon and his two men disembarked to collect birds. Diddy and I lived long and regally in the Residence, fattening up on magnificent repasts with Mr. Beets and the controlleur of the district. At lunch we joined

them in a glass of beer and before dinner drank small glasses of Holland gin with them. It was not for a long time that we discovered that these two beverages were tabu to Dutch ladies, who are supposed to confine their alcoholic adventures to whiskey or cocktails.

‘Goodness, how awful!’ we said in unison, horrified at having made such a breach of etiquette, and hastily putting down our glasses. ‘Were you terribly shocked? What on earth did you think of us?’

‘Oh,’ said the controlleur, hastening to reassure us, ‘Mr. Beets said, “They’s no ladies, they’s camarades.”’

‘Of course,’ said Mr. Beets. ‘Prosit.’

\* \* \* \*

By the time we reached Serui on the island of Japan, Martin had pneumonia. Luckily there was a hospital run by a Dutch medical missionary, and there Martin was installed in as much comfort as possible under the circumstances.

Freddy was very keen to get some good pictures of unspoiled and interesting native life, and the controlleur of Serui recommended a village called Nubuai on the south coast of the bay. Perhaps Freddy was influenced by the fact that Mr. Vlack described the Nubuai girls as the prettiest in New Guinea, for what that was worth; at any rate he was very complacent about my staying on board and measuring natives in the various other places at which the *Chiva* would touch. Mr. Vlack very kindly sailed with us to Nubuai to see that Freddy had the proper introductions.

Nubuai is the Venice of New Guinea. The village is built in a broad and shallow river, the houses rising on stilts out of the water, and to get anywhere at all you drop off your front veranda into a canoe. The Nubuaians, in fact, live

under conditions perfect for development into one of those widely publicized web-footed tribes which, like the Indian rope trick, everyone talks about and no one has seen. It was with a vague feeling of disappointment that I noticed their feet to be of the typical splayed Papuan pattern, though perhaps this might be explained by the miles and miles they trotted around their verandas when they had a dance. Papuans have in them none of the music and rhythm of the African negro. Shuffle and scuff, shuffle and scuff, or just plain stamp, stamp, stamp is the acme of their terpsichorean achievement.

In Nubuai the shuffle-and-scuff school predominates. The men with drums and bird-of-paradise plumes in their stiffly trimmed hair lead the procession at a slow jiggling trot. Behind them stream the Nubuai beauties in their bead aprons and shells, their hair unwound from their pandanus-leaf curlpapers and combed out in Golliwog style. The girls don't even trot, they simply walk, around and around and around. There must be some mysterious source of uplift in this desultory performance, for Freddy said they kept it up for two days and two nights after we left.

We deserted Freddy, with Evart as apprehensive body-guard, very abruptly, for the miasma of the *Chiva* had claimed still another victim. Mr. Vlack was down with the most violent attack of malaria that we ever witnessed in New Guinea. We laid him on the deck, shivering, delirious, and vomiting, and headed hastily back for Serui and the hospital. To our intense relief, just as we pulled into port he sat up and stared around him, still dazed and very shaky, but temporarily recovered.

In Serui we found Martin over his crisis and on the way to recovery, so we set out for Biak to pick up Dillon. By this time the *Chiva* was fairly short-handed, and we were



delighted when the doctor asked if we would take him with us to visit his clinic in Biak. That night he and Diddy Lowndes drew the twelve-to-four watch. We had all had coaching on peering occasionally at the Diesel, though we had a very sketchy notion of what we were expected to find there. As Doctor Hoveler was even more unfamiliar with the engine than the rest of us, it fell to Diddy to go through this gazing process under the galley table every half-hour or so.

‘Perfectly ridiculous,’ said Doctor Hoveler. ‘As though women ever knew anything about engines and mechanics!’

Suddenly the engine stopped. The abrupt silence woke us all and we straggled out to see what was the matter. The engine looked much the same as ever but refused to be started again. It wasn’t until Charlie Smith had taken it mostly apart that he discovered the cause of the trouble. A jar of marmalade had fallen off the galley table and rolled into the Diesel, breaking and liberally spreading marmalade over some vital part.

‘You see,’ said Doctor Hoveler triumphantly. ‘What did I say about women and mechanics? Would a man ever get marmalade in an engine?’

When we picked up Dillon and his two bird-hunters, we also picked up several dozen more live birds and boxes full of dead ones, a passenger who developed blood poisoning in his leg, and two cases of malaria. Back to Nubuai once more to collect Freddy and Evart and finally Martin, weak but well, in Serui. Then off for our return trip to Sorong.

About two nights east of Manokwari we had kippered herring for supper. To me there is nothing more revolting than that particular fish, and I haughtily refused it, preferring to go hungry, which in those days meant a good deal. Freddy and Dillon made rather pigs of themselves, it seemed to me at the time.

That night Freddy and I were on the twelve-to-four. About one o'clock Freddy doubled up in spasms. The symptoms grew more and more acute, until it was obvious to the meanest intelligence that he had a virulent attack of ptomaine poisoning. I was frantic with anxiety and left the wheel to hover helplessly over him, with not the faintest idea what to do. Charlie Smith, asleep on the forward deck, woke up to see the horizon spinning slowly around him in the moonlight and dashed back to see what had happened. We laid Freddy out as best we could in blankets and I rushed down the companionway to consult our medical handbook. Swaying at the bottom of it, bright green by the light of the chart-table lamp, stood Dillon.

'My God, I feel sick,' he said feebly.

The next two days were a nightmare. Charlie Smith had a relapse from his appendectomy and remained in his bunk. We tucked Freddy and Dillon into the stateroom and tried to dribble Klim and brandy down their throats at intervals. The bird-hunters got malaria again and Martin was still an invalid. That left four of us to sail the *Chiva* and tend the sick. We recuperated slightly for a day in Manokwari, but by the time we arrived in Sorong we were a boatload of wan and peevish people, ready to snap at each other and anyone else foolhardy enough to approach us. We were dispirited, exhausted, and very, very cross. It was a sad ending to the fun and pleasures we had shared for so many months together.

# Three

## Our first 'patrolli'

THE PARTING of our ways came in Sorong. The *Chiva* set out on a long and dreary voyage to Manila, leaving Dillon, Freddy, and me in Sorong. Our friend Mr. van der Goot had told us of Sainke Doek, an inland station where we could be allowed to take up residence, a focal point for three of the mountain tribes because of its enormous sago swamp. The natives of Sainke Doek had had a recent lesson in the inadvisability of an anthropophagous diet, but were otherwise still unspoiled. Mr. van der Goot was planning a long patrol through the western Vogelkopf. He would drop us off on his way, but Dillon could continue with him, collecting birds throughout the region. Mr. and Mrs. van der Goot lent us some furniture, and with Martin we moved into the Pasangrahan to make our preparations.

New Guinea differs from other lands in a number of ways and there are, consequently, a number of lessons to be learned on the spot, lessons impossible to assimilate beforehand by any preliminary research. One of New Guinea's unique problems is that of transporting yourself from one place to another in the total absence of the customary methods of travel and locomotion. In the first place, there are no hotels, no furnished rooms, no restaurants. There are no railroads, no roads, no automobiles, no pack-animals, no wagons or sledges. Man is, in fact, the only mobile unit and the only beast of burden. Your arrival at any desig-

nated spot in the interior is entirely dependent on your own two feet, which you often find yourself wishing were webbed, for they spend even more time in swamps and mud and rivers than on dry land. There are other problems besides that of self-transportation. You must learn to move like a snail with your house on your back, or a number of other people's backs.

In the Sorong Pasangrahan Freddy and I spent an agitated two weeks planning what we needed to set up house-keeping in Sainke Doek, while Dillon tried to arrange for the most nourishment in the least space on his long 'patrolli' with Mr. van der Goot. The three of us made interminable lists of cans, of bedding, of bags of rice computed on an average of daily consumption. Every day the mounds of equipment spread farther over the cement floor: beds, chairs, a table, food, crockery, kitchen utensils, clothes, soap, towels, sheets and blankets, lamps and kerosene to burn in them, books, matches, medicines and bandages. Every night we went to a party where an Ambonese dance orchestra alternated with the throbbing rhythm of Moslem drums, where we tried gracelessly to follow the Ambonese in the delicate motions of a 'Minari,' and where we had a beautiful time.

Once we were certain that we had assembled every conceivable human need for our future existence, the business of packing began. In spite of our dissipations, the day before our scheduled departure we had everything sturdily stowed away in double kerosene tins specially soldered for us and painted a cerulean blue. We were as proud of their colour as of their capacity.

Mr. van der Goot dropped in to inspect our progress. 'Papuan are not strong,' he said, 'and the walking is rough. Fifteen kilos is the limit one man can carry.'

He lifted the edge of one of our tin containers and it fell to the floor with a bang. 'That weighs about fifty kilos,' he said coolly, and walked off.

We sat in paralyzed silence and looked at each other in despair. The circles of exhaustion under Martin's eyes seemed to creep down to his chin. Finally someone had an inspiration — copra sacks. Through the noonday sun we rushed to Ong Tjoean's and bought enough to ship the produce of a good-sized coconut plantation. Sorting and hefting, we redistributed everything according to its weight irrespective of suitability and convenience. Medicines rattled around among cans of food, books among mosquito nets and soap; ammunition was wrapped in shorts and shirts and each loose bundle tied together at the top with string. Into single kerosene tins we stowed the very lightest objects, regretfully saying good-bye to the double blue ones. It was anything but elegant luggage, but it fulfilled all requirements.

Eventually, we learned to face the problems of transportation with light-hearted equanimity. We knew that with the first streaks of dawn we must not only be out of our beds, but must begin taking them down. We must swallow our coffee hastily so that Martin could wash the pot for the trip, brew some rice and corned beef for a cold lunch, and boil our drinking water for the day. We must watch the carriers as they ran excitedly through the house, all hurrying to get the lightest loads and leave the heavy ones for someone else. We had to see that they did not place an invaluable glass lamp-chimney in the bottom of a basket underneath fourteen pounds of ammunition. At the last minute there were always a number of unpackable objects left over, perhaps because the distinction between packing and not packing was sometimes so delicate as to be unno-

ticeable. One fortunate man's load would be a small kerosene lamp in one hand and a bird's perch in the other, or perhaps a cooking-pot containing a cassowary egg and two bars of soap. The boiled water always travelled in a green tea-kettle with a cup hanging over the spout to be available as a thirst-quencher en route.

Martin on these occasions was ubiquitous, an army in himself, washing dishes, preparing lunch, packing food and pots, taking furniture to pieces, shouting at the carriers, and keeping careful track of every separate object.

'Where is my tripod?' Freddy would call to him over the hubbub.

Martin would raise harassed eyes from a mosquito net he was rolling up. 'That man there has part of it, and the old man from Swailbe has the rest, Tuan.'

One of the infallible rules was that anything which could be broken down into separate parts must be carried by several separate men. Otherwise putting things together again would have been too easy to be fun.

Time and experience made these confusing manoeuvres seem easy and familiar. Our first introduction, however, we found nerve-racking in the extreme.

We were to start at dawn on the *Ursula*, the government boat which would take us up the coast. About midnight the night before we fell into a troubled slumber, punctuated by nightmares of missing the boat.

At two o'clock we were roused by Martin's voice, high-pitched with fright and urgency.

'Tuan, Tuan, Nunya, get out of the house quickly!'

'The house!' I thought incredulously. 'Martin is daft. We're on the *Ursula* rocking about in a storm.'

There was no doubt about the rocking. Our beds were swaying, things were clattering to the floor. But it was the

earth, not the sea, that heaved. Disentangling ourselves from our mosquito nets, grabbing up coats and Rebo, we rushed outside. In the dim distance we could discern Mr. van der Goot's pajama-clad figure peering anxiously at the water, wondering whether it, too, was planning to misbehave, whether a tidal wave was forming to engulf all of the low coral island except the 'gunung.' After a while the earth tired of quaking and we returned gingerly to bed for a last cat nap.

We got up in the dark, which proved to be a futile expression of our good intentions, for it was impossible to see to pack without unpacking our lamps. By the time it was light enough to see the *Ursula* was tooting impatiently. Carriers ran to and fro, as addled as we. Freddy's cot refused to come apart, and at the last moment I discovered our entire coffee supply sitting forgotten on the back porch. Breathless, trembling, and perspiring from our exertions and agitation, we and our possessions were finally on board, Rebo clawing me in a spasm of terror at the noise and confusion.

I dared not turn Rebo loose in the handsomely appointed saloon. She and I curled up drowsily on a pile of sleeping-bags in the bow.

The northwest monsoon, always treacherous and unpredictable, kicked up such a heavy sea that it proved impossible to land at Mega, the village from which the walk to Sainke Doek was comparatively easy. Instead we had to push on to Sausapore. Mr. van der Goot had, with admirable perspicacity, notified both places that we should be arriving, for it takes days to collect the hundred-odd natives necessary for so large a patrol.

Sausapore was a hot, dull little village containing a native magistrate, a Chinese trade store with empty shelves, a

school, a rest-house, and some forlornly beautiful hibiscus. In honour of Mr. van der Goot's arrival the school children had been assembled with clothes on, a Dutch flag, banners saying 'Welcome, Tuan Padoeka,' and two fifes to accompany the singing of the Dutch national anthem. Chiefs of all the neighbouring districts came and saluted smartly, each telling how many carriers he had brought with him.

It took two hours and the padding of many feet to bring our mound of bare necessities from the wharf to the rest-house, where we put up our beds and unpacked our food and pots, the prospect of another dawn start rather preying on our minds.

In the night fifty of the carriers, having taken a good look at our equipment, ran away. Papuans are allergic to unnecessary effort. It is quite comprehensible that they should prefer roaming the forests on their own business to marching over difficult trails with inexplicable weights on their backs, often penetrating into what is to them hostile territory. The fact that they are paid for it is a negligible inducement, since money is to them totally valueless.

By dawn pandemonium warned us that something was amiss. Chiefs, headmen, and the native magistrate were haranguing, and being angrily harangued, but that produced no effect on the escaped culprits. It was suddenly decided that, owing to the shortage of men, we must leave all but the most crucial articles behind us to be fetched at some later date. This precipitated a frenzied diving to the bottoms of copra sacks which all looked alike, packing, unpacking, sorting, and repacking amid endless arguments as to whether it was better to dispense with rice than with our cots, and whether a table to eat on was more essential than something to eat.

Finally the carriers, boxes and bundles strapped with



rattan to their backs, squatted down, two by two, in an endless row. The Javanese sergeant blew his whistle and we were off.

Besides being farther away from Sainke Doek than Mega, Sausapore had the added disadvantage of not being connected to it by any trail. In order to reach any sort of track through the jungle we had to plough for nine or ten miles along the beach. The sand was soft and deep, the sun was fierce and bright, and there was no shade. We waded up to our waists through two broad rivers and skirted well out into the ocean around a jutting headland. Our high boots and heavy trousers absorbed and retained the water gratefully. Hypnotized into semi-unconsciousness, for hour after hour I dragged one waterlogged foot out of deep sand and planted it again in deep sand a few inches ahead of me, eyes tight shut against the merciless glare, the water squelching out of my boots, only to pour in again over their tops.

Rebo was a further torture. She came from cool green mountain forests and the heat drove her very nearly insane. Drops pouring from the tip of her pink tongue and frothing around her black muzzle, she climbed miserably up and down me in search of a shadow that was not there. I mumbled angrily to her that it was worse for me than for her — after all, I did the walking, and it was hardly fair to make matters any more difficult than they already were. She only chattered back at me and scrabbled the more desperately.

Finally, like the last-minute reprieve for a man standing before the firing-squad, Mr. van der Goot ordered a halt for lunch in a patch of shade by a tumbling stream. We dragged off our boots and attacked our cold rice and corned beef as though it had been ambrosia. Rebo sat and panted on a wet rock, Evart screamed at a water snake, and we

lay on our backs and smoked, suddenly at our ease in the best of all possible worlds, for Mr. van der Goot had told us we were through with the scorching beach — we had reached the jungle trail. Even our blisters seemed to heal as we started off again with a fresh burst of enthusiasm through the damp green twilight, splashing in the mud, tripping over the interlocking maze of roots, brushing aside the prickly vines that lovingly embraced us. When we halted for the carriers to catch up with us, big leaves were laid as mats for us on sodden fallen trees, where we sat and flicked off the leeches. Two natives of the district were with us as guides, for the trail was a native trail, aimless and vague as a wild animal's, now detouring around a pandanus clump, now disappearing entirely for a while. In spite of the fact that half our meagre possessions had been left behind, the carriers trailed out behind us for at least a mile.

Shortly before sundown we reached a little river whose sandy bed cut a yellow swath through the jungle green. A wild pig darted out of the way ahead of us. Here, like music to our ears, came Mr. van der Goot's voice saying:

'This is where we "bivac" tonight.'

Promptly we sat down in the river bed and took off our boots. We continued to sit there, barefoot, watching the sulky carriers straggle in and gratefully squat to dump their loads, hearing at the same time the distant clop-clop of kerosene tins banging against bare backs. A mountain of gear accumulated in all directions around us.

Obviously the carriers were not enjoying the trip. Why we were there at all, why we needed so many useless-looking things with us, and why they had not had the foresight to run away in the middle of the night like their luckier fellows, were doubtless some of the vexatious problems over which they brooded. Having most of them come from

the coast and dressed up in their best for the trip, some of the men sported odd and dirty snatches of clothing — a pair of striped and baggy underdrawers, the skeleton of an ancient sweater, even an imitation leopardskin cap.

The police stacked their rifles and left a guard over them, a sudden reminder that we were not in the friendliest of countries. Shortly before, on the south coast, a careless police official and his escort had neglected this precaution and been slaughtered to a man. In the brief space of time that it took us to bathe up the river, a shelter under Mr. van der Goot's supervision had arisen on the bank — a long roof of leaves and branches over a raised floor of poles. At one end, on a platform, the soldiery were alternately to sleep and watch. At the other end our civilian members, servants and bird-hunters, put up their nets. The exact centre was reserved for the cots of Mr. van der Goot, Dillon, Freddy, and myself.

That night, insect life was rampant. The carrier of my cot had, I decided, made me a generous gift. It was as well for everyone else that I slept only sporadically, for Rebo slept not at all. After the confinement of my right arm all day, she felt the need of exercise, recreation, and investigation. I tried to make her stay on my cot under the mosquito net. She would have none of it, and with her little black paws repeatedly excavated an exit. What she had in mind was to pay a round of calls on each of thirty-odd recumbent forms. I would leap from bed just in time to catch her earnestly digging a hole in Mr. van der Goot's net, or ready to pounce on the bare toes of a snoring soldier.

In desperation I finally emptied my rucksack higgledy-piggledy on the floor and popped Rebo inside. By a complicated system of lacings at the top I tried simultaneously to ventilate her and prevent her escape. Rebo indignantly

wormed her head through these, and, her body still encased in the rucksack, began hopping noisily around the floor, looking like some magically animated piece of baggage. This seemed a dubious improvement over the previous situation and I suspended Rebo and rucksack from the end of my bed. With Houdini-like rapidity she extricated herself and bounced proudly onto the top of my net.

From then on I tried to compose myself in slumber, clutching the end of her tail in one hand. It was, all in all, an unsatisfactory night. At dawn I washed my hands of Rebo and fell into a deep sleep. Ten minutes later I woke to find the 'patrolli' ready to start, the carriers almost packed. My cot rose, conspicuous and alone, in the centre of a great empty space.

'Hurry up,' said Freddy, prodding me. 'The whole army is waiting for you.'

'Oh, dear,' I thought miserably. 'I know what they are all saying. The place for women and animals is in the home.'

That day it rained, which meant that the mud was a little deeper and the leaves that slapped us a little wetter. After an interminable period — it must have been about ten o'clock — we left the muddy swamp and began to climb. At the same time the rain stopped. Whenever you start up a steep incline in New Guinea the vegetation becomes sparser so that the broiling rays of the sun shall not be deflected from your panting body. When we reached the top of what seemed to me a prodigious mountain, the forest suddenly started to echo with weird and really indescribable sounds — a strange sort of caterwauling, a succession of staccato bayings. It was the first time we heard this noise, which afterwards became so familiar to us. When a group of men approach a village they signal to their friends

their impending arrival. Each individual musical yelp somehow fuses into the fugue-like pattern of the whole.

On this occasion we were within shouting distance of Swailbe. Only the descent of the mountain and the rushing Mega River stood between us and lunch. So swollen and rapid was the Mega that we had to make a hand-to-hand chain across to prevent slipping on the rocks and being swept downstream.

Swailbe was, for New Guinea, a surprisingly fertile little inland village. Sugar cane, banana palms bearing the best bananas in the world, and papaya trees beckoned temptingly to us. On the rickety veranda of the rest-house, swathed in dust and cobwebs, we took off our boots to dry and quenched our thirst on warm water and juicy papayas.

'This place,' said Mr. van der Goot, 'is a very good one for food. The last time I was here I had some delicious mice.'

'Mice?' we asked. 'Do you really care for mice?'

'Of course,' said Mr. van der Goot. 'There is nothing better than tender young mice.'

'Do you eat them raw?' I asked, straining for the proper degree of casualness.

'No, no; just boiled a little while.'

I tried to distract my mind from this conversation. It was months later that we said one day to Mrs. van der Goot: 'Your husband is even more rugged than we thought. Do you know that when he is on a patrol he sometimes eats mice?'

'But yes,' said Mrs. van der Goot. 'Don't you have it in America? You spell it m-a-i-z-e.'

Now Mr. van der Goot surveyed my largest blister critically.

'If we spend the night here,' he said, 'you won't be able

to walk tomorrow. We must reach Sainke Doek this afternoon.'

Plodding on that afternoon, I was both surprised and pleased to observe that neither Freddy nor Dillon seemed much brisker than I. Walking in New Guinea requires a technique all its own. Every step is onto something either sticky or slippery. Either you sink into sucking swampy mud, or skate precariously over a maze of twisting enormous roots. On the government trails long log cat-walks often span the swampier spots. Skiddish as they are when laid crosswise, corduroy fashion, it is when peeled and glistening trunks lie longitudinally side by side for long distances that miraculous feats of balanced co-ordination are necessary. The wet soles of our boots slipping regularly into the interstices, Dillon and I condoled with each other, disgusted with Freddy because he had hobnails and with ourselves because we had not.

When we finally slithered into the clearing that was Sainke Doek our hearts leapt up, only to sink again with a dull thud. So this was to be our future home? This barren desolate waste of fallen rotting trees where the sun beat down on a few bleached gardens, on the ramshackle palm houses of the natives? Sapeholo, the Ambonese magistrate of Sainke Doek, stood stiffly at attention to greet us at the edge of the clearing. Above the knees, he wore dazzling white; below, he was encrusted with mud. The rest of the population peered nervously at us through the doors of their houses. Two children ran away, screaming with fright. The Kapala, or headman, in a G-string and a khaki shirt, came apprehensively to greet us, saluting with his left hand as his right was wrapped in a poultice of green leaves, mud, and dirty rags.

To our relief we were ushered on by Sapeholo to another

little clearing a short distance beyond the village. Here, proud and tall on its stilts, stood our house, alone among green grass, the wall of the jungle rising in a horseshoe around it. Golden brown in the setting sun, it looked as though a magic wand had conjured it from the earth and trees. Actually, it was the Netherland East Indian Government, in the person of Mr. van der Goot, that had very kindly ordered it constructed for us. It was a masterpiece of tropical engineering: without any doubt the finest residence in New Guinea. Built by an astonished and admiring group of Papuans, it stood on stilts about five feet above the ground. No alien influence from the age of iron and steel intruded among the sago palm leaves and slender local tree-trunks. The front steps were actually a broad tilted ladder — cross-rungs lashed to two outside poles. The floor was lashed to upright poles by rattan; by rattan each separate palm-leaf strip was tied to the skeleton of the roof. The walls of our bedroom and storeroom were made of palm-leaf midribs, which Nature has ingeniously formed to fit together in a nearly perfect tongue and groove; when a sharp stick is run through a dozen of these like a dowel, you have a portable section of wall. Venetian blinds of the same material, strung together on pliable strips of rattan, could be rolled up or down at will over our windows. For the roof, sago palm leaves were bent double on themselves, each one forming a long strip fringed at the bottom, solid at the top. In a wind these rustled and flapped on top of one another like the agitated pages of a gigantic newspaper.

Our floor was unlike anything we had ever seen before. Across a checkerboard of poles narrow strips of palm stalk were lashed two or three inches apart. So, for every bit of solid floor there was a corresponding interstice giving an uninterrupted view of the ground below. What floor there was

being extremely thin and springy, we felt as though we were walking across a network of elastic bands.

Through the floor our furniture rose from the ground below. As it was impossible to balance any four-legged object on the floor without at least two legs slipping promptly through, this problem had been solved by having the legs go through anyway and elongating them until they rested on solid ground beneath us. If the house had been suddenly removed from around them, tables and beds would have stood there eight feet high, as though they had been built to order for Pantagruel. The surfaces of the furniture were made on the same architectural principles as the floor — strip, space, strip.

Immediately we had climbed our ladderlike front steps we felt at home. The rustle of the roof in the breeze, the long-legged tables and beds which rose on tiptoe from the ground below, the curious little Papuan urchins who peeped up at us through the floor, gave a feeling of arboreal life, of nesting like our remote ancestors in the crook of branches, secure and aloof from terrestrial things.

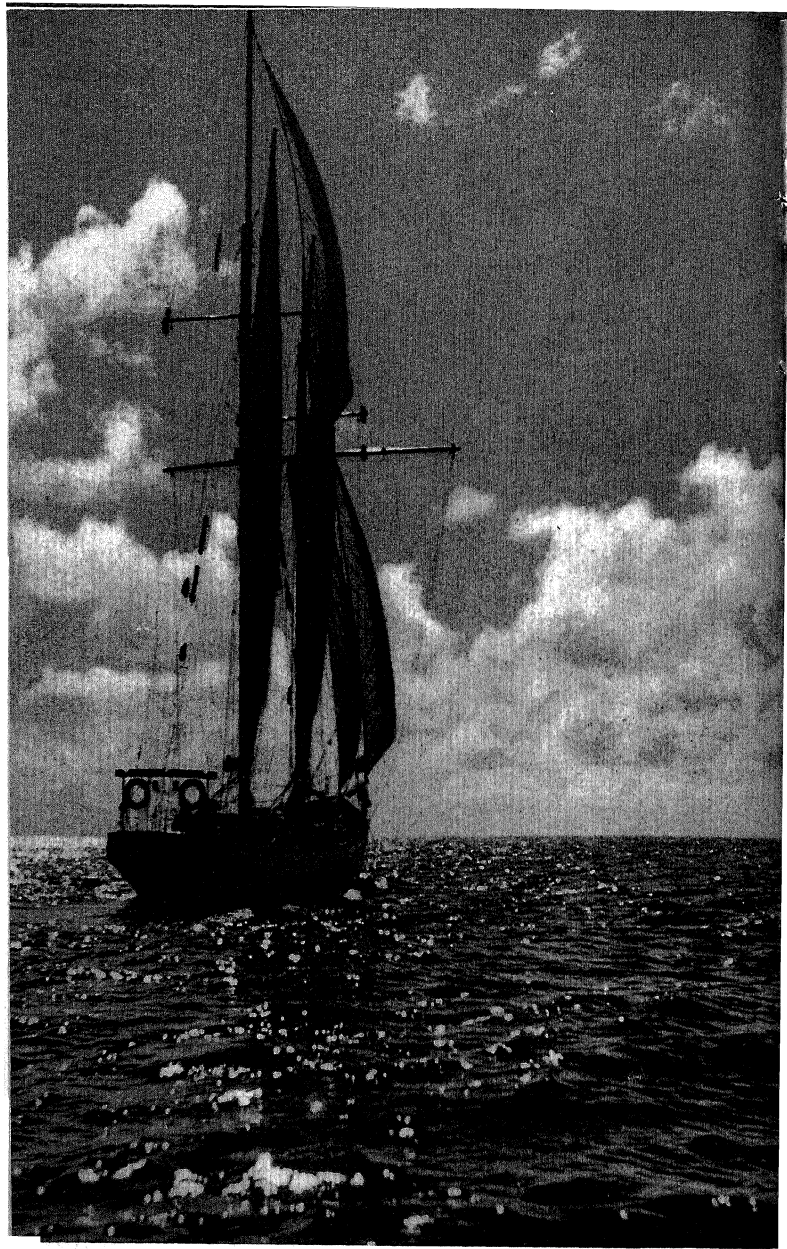


**Our Boat  
Our House  
and  
Our Neighbours**





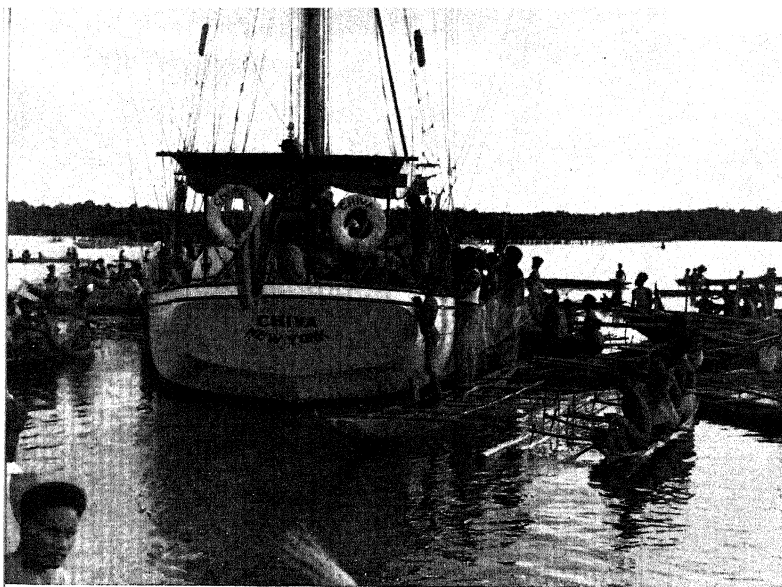
REBO, THE TREE-KANGAROO, READS OVER THE AUTHOR'S SHOULDER



*CHIVA UNDER WAY*

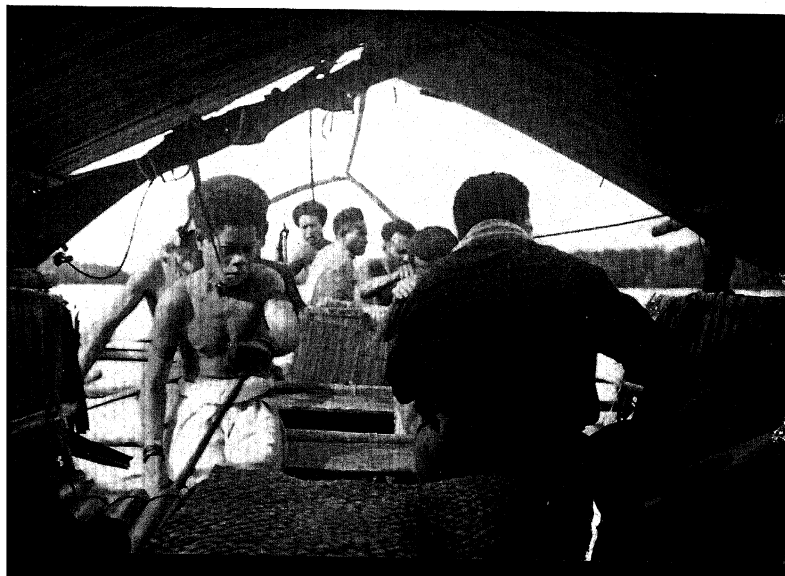


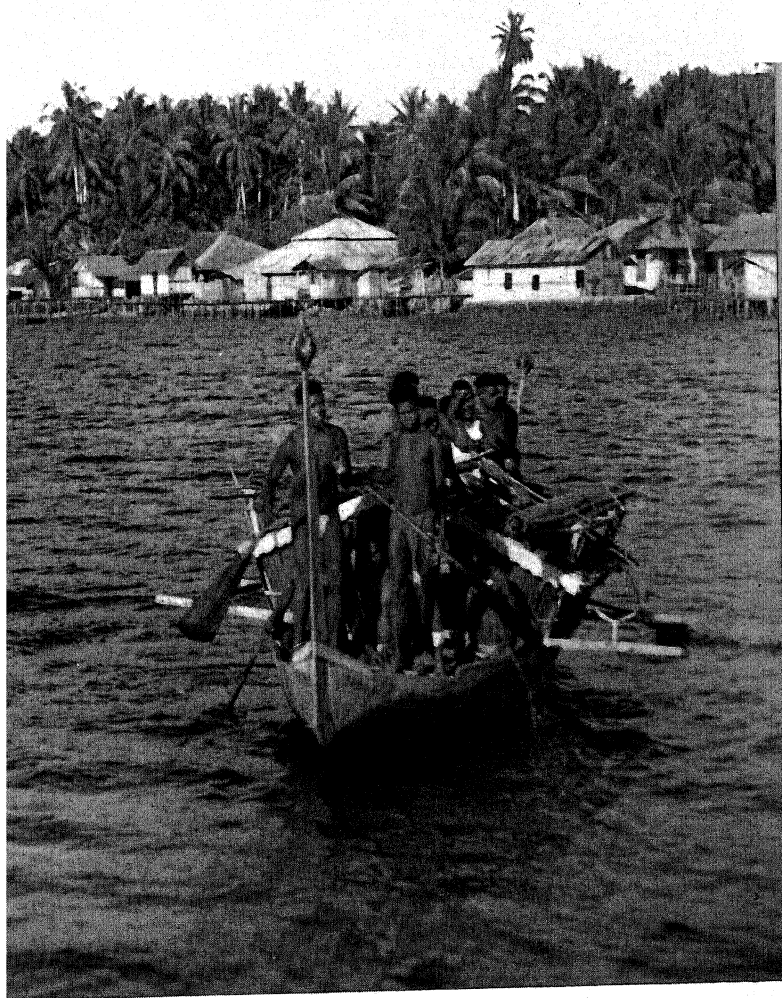
MINGGO, THE WALLABY, ON BOARD THE *CHIVA*



*CHIVA* AT ANCHOR IN NUBUAI

INTERIOR OF A PRAHU



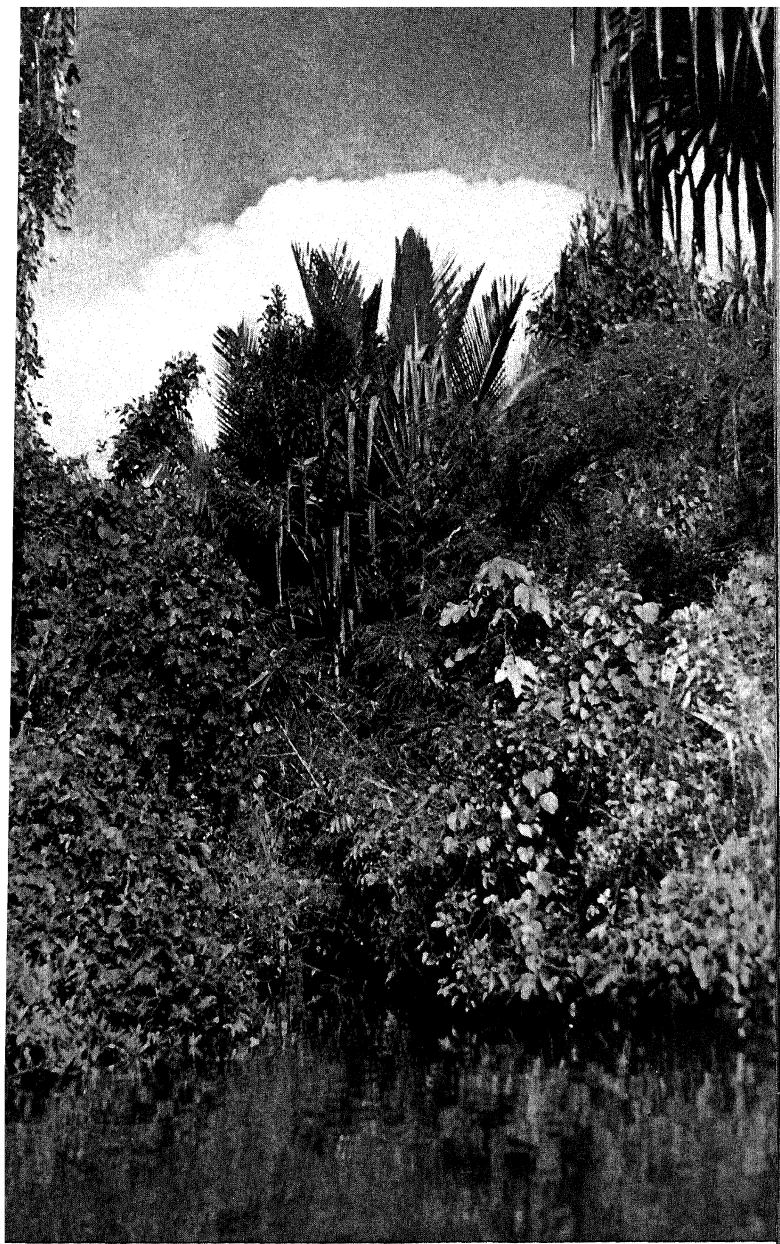


SORONG ON THE ISLAND OF DOOM

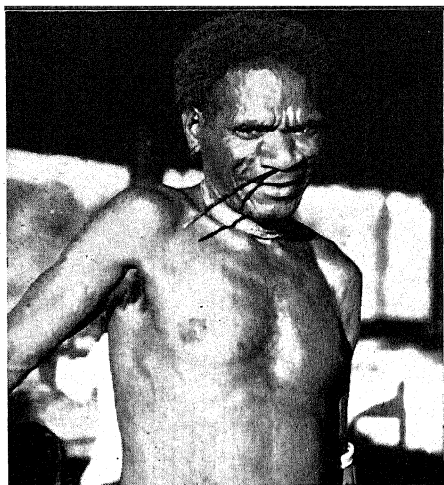


THE HOUSE IN THE RAIN FOREST

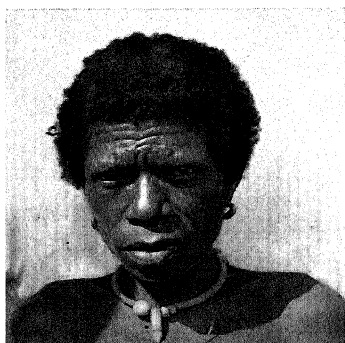




THE SAGO SWAMP



UNGOLO ON OUR VERANDA



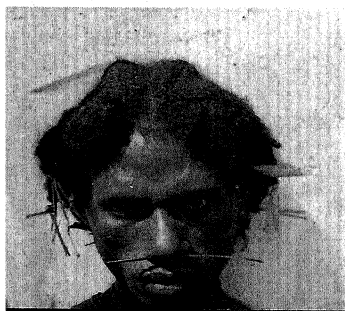
NAYULIT

DISPLEASED TO BE  
PHOTOGRAPHED



A HANDSOME YOUNG MORAID

NABWOM, THE JOB  
OF SAINKE DOEK





NAISISTO AND HER FAMILY

TWO BOYS DOING STRING FIGURES

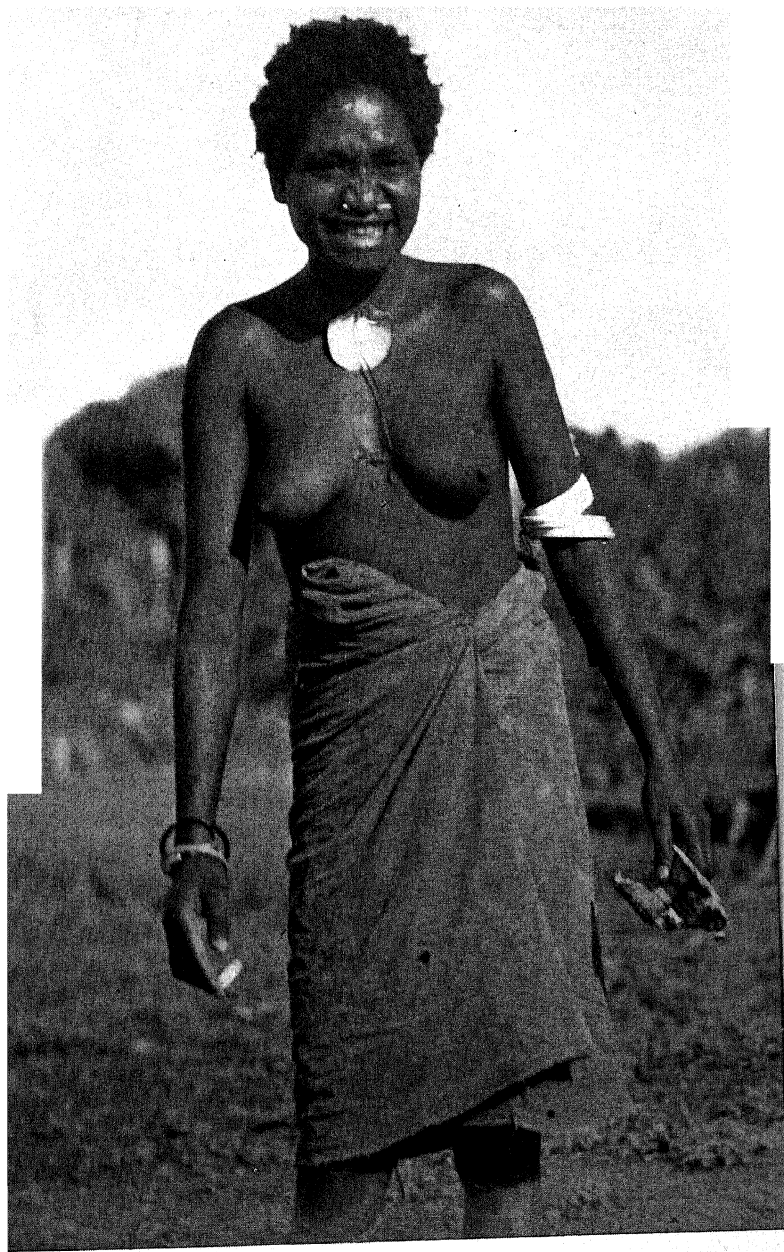




THE FIRST FAMILY OF SAINKE DOEK, SAKÉ AND KAM

FREDDY BRINGS HOME THE BACON





EMDUR, THE MADIK MESSALINA

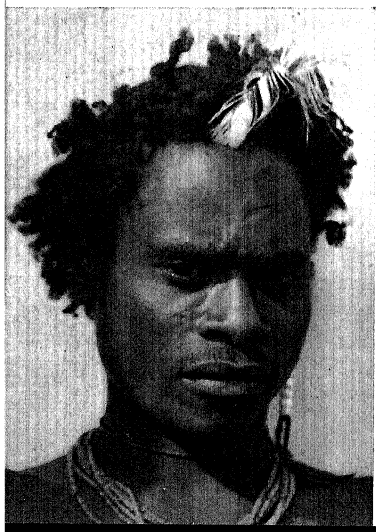


KOMURI, THE BRIDE OF SLOMSLI

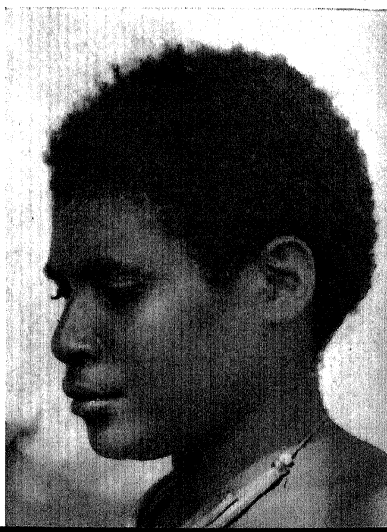


SOME MORAIID WORE HATS

A YOUNG MADIK



LESI, WHO LOVED AKAR







### TYPICAL GIRLS OF NUBUAI

se tries to be different in Nubuai. They all fluff the hair and tattoo the stomach and let it go at that, plus bracelets.

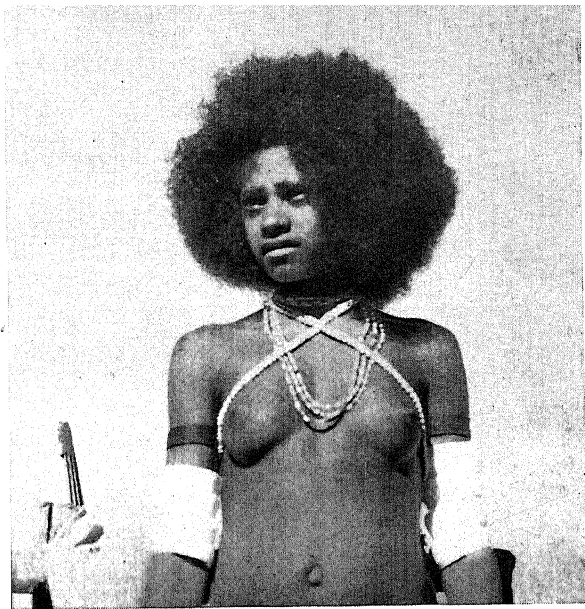


READY TO TRAVEL

THE MEN OF DENBA



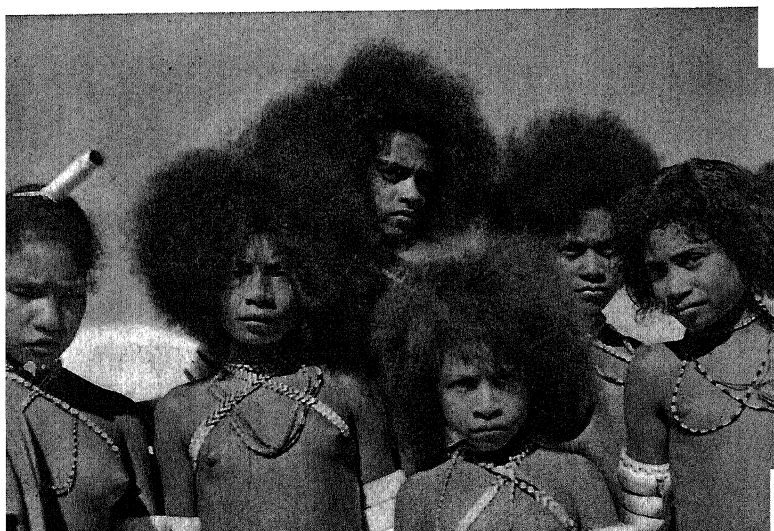




NUBUAI GIRL

#### HAIR DOS, WAROPEN COAST

hair is in a tight sausage (see left), and after it has been set a few hours, it can be fluffed out for the effect in the at the right — what happens when you jump off your veranda into the river.





THE BELLE OF NUBUAI

# Four

## Cannibals to Call

**WHEN** we first arrived in Sainke Doek we were, of course, completely ignorant about the inhabitants and their ways. The only source of information on the subject was the natives themselves, and at first they seemed indisposed to share it with us. At the outset Freddy and I secretly considered it rather courageous of us to contemplate living among people whose last meal of human flesh had been very recently consumed. We soon found, however, that the shoe was on the other foot: that our great problem was to allay the fear with which we inspired the Papuans. Wherever we went we seemed to precipitate the same sort of panic as that fabulous monster, the Spanish horse, created among the Aztecs. Children screamed when we approached them and hid behind their trembling mothers; strong men quaked and ran away to hide.

At first we were amused, then mildly indignant, and finally humiliated and displeased. We knew that we were definitely outsize and that our colour was unusual, but it is wounding to one's ego to be habitually shunned. At last we decided to employ the tactics of a wild-animal trainer — move cautiously and possess ourselves with patience. In the meantime we stared surreptitiously at our unwilling neighbours and modestly hoped that familiarity with the sight of us would breed at least unconcern.

The bravest person in the village turned out to be eight-

year-old Kam, the son of Saké, the chief. He was a bright-faced little monkey with enormous eyes veiled behind ridiculously long lashes and a scar on one cheek where as a baby he had tumbled into the fire.

Followed by two nervous companions, he came one afternoon to call. We laid ourselves out to be as entertaining as though the last crowned head of Europe had deigned to enter our house. With vulgar hospitality we loaded him with beads, biscuits, and fishhooks. This system of crude bribery was effective. He came again the next day, bringing more and bolder little friends in his wake. By the end of that auspicious week most of the children had practically taken up residence in our house. Once the parents saw that their children associated with us and came home afterwards not only intact, but with presents as well, they gradually screwed up their courage to the point of coming to see us too. The best means of luring them in, we discovered, was to pretend absorption in a book or some concentrated activity until they were well up on the veranda. If we glanced up and saw them en route, they were apt to make an elaborate display of searching for something on the ground — and to bolt for home the moment we looked away. Once they had squatted down and accepted cigarettes their fears seemed to be allayed and their curiosity fully aroused. The next day the first scouts would appear with friends in tow, proud to show off simultaneously their amazing courage and their familiarity with us and our strange belongings.

Our possessions would scarcely have impressed anyone but a Papuan, consisting, as they did, in the barest necessities of life purchased from a Chinese trade store. In Sainke Doek, however, Freddy's shotgun and camera, my ancient typewriter, our tattered shorts, our cans of food and magazines created a veritable sensation among people who beat

their clothes out of bark, who slept on pandanus-leaf mats, and who pounded their food from the trunk of the sago palm.

So, like two nouveaux riches in a community of the impoverished genteel, we were gradually accepted by neighbours dazzled by the splendour and magnificence with which we surrounded ourselves. At the same time we became very favourably impressed by the members of the society which we had crashed. Their manners were so faultless that we often felt ashamed. This was not merely happenstance. We often heard one small child severely reprimanding another for some contemplated infringement of their code of gentle courtesy. Ill-temper was as rare as rudeness. There were plenty of family scenes — what household could be without them? — but no sour, bitter grudges, no dark and ugly moods.

Once our neighbours had concluded that we were neither government spies nor sinister maniacs, most of them apparently became completely reconciled to our presence there; almost overnight we were promoted from questionable strangers into friends. Word must have been passed far and wide that we were harmless and well-intentioned, for people from far away whom we had never met felt perfectly free to make themselves at home in our house, greeting us with smiles which seemed to say:

‘We have heard of you, and doubtless you have heard of us.’

The tribe among whom we lived was the Madik. They were about five hundred strong, and formed a sort of buffer state between the large coastal Moi tribe to the north, which straggled all the way to Sorong, and the wilder inland tribes to the south. The Moi we cared for not at all — they were ugly, black, and obsequious from long subjection to the minions of the Tidorese Rajahs. For the inland tribes,

especially the lusty Moraid, who were close to the Madik both geographically and genealogically, we were full of respectful admiration. The Moraid were tall, lean, and proud to the point of arrogance. A band of them entering Sainke Doek in single file, bristling with bows and spears, shouting their marching songs, stepping rhythmically with their superb and disdainful carriage, was a sight to make us catch our breath. Like all buffers, the Madik were more timid and gentle than these boisterous neighbours. They were a little people with yellow-brown skins and dusty hair which in some of the women had a distinct auburn tinge.

In their aesthetic ideas and in their manner of life the Madik and Moraid closely resemble each other. Both strive to make up for their lack of comeliness by a wealth of decoration. Through the pierced septums of their noses they thrust shining black cassowary quills or bone plugs. From the little holes in the sides of their noses wisps of cassowary plume or flowering grass wave jauntily, and one ear generally has a long earring of twine and beads, shell or feathers, hanging to the shoulder.

It is in their hairdress that they really excel. I found to my sorrow, when I attempted to imitate it, that the style is adapted only to hair of Papuan consistency. A series of parts are made with geometric precision, fanwise over the whole head. The hair between each part is tightly braided down close to the scalp, ending in surprising little fly-by-night pigtails framing the face. To the ends of these, bits of shredded palm leaf, beads, or beetles are attached, and around the crowns of their heads they wear shell headbands or string snoods. They often stick their bamboo combs into their hair, or a cassowary thighbone to which bright-coloured feathers have been attached.

Since their clothes are unimportant and sketchy, consist-

ing of a brief bark-cloth skirt for the women and a G-string for the men, they have unlimited background for more interesting bodily decorations: necklaces of shells and beads and crocodile teeth, red bandoliers and belts, woven arm and leg bands with designs in orchid leaf, bracelets of trochus shell, but, most of all, feathers. New Guinea offers of its best to them, graceful plumes of the bird of paradise, cockatoo and lory feathers fluttering red and white, green and blue. Sometimes traces of tattooing can be seen on brown faces, but scarification shows up more clearly. The women especially have longitudinal lines of double scars down their stomachs with an X marking the centre. It is only the Sigiali men to the south who cover their foreheads with parallel scars and wear like a jewel in their navels a blob of red mud.

After we had lived among the Madik and Moraid for a while it never occurred to us any longer that they were not a very personable and normal-appearing people. With the exception of Martin and the monkey-like physiognomy of Sapeholo — both Ambonese — we saw no other types for seven months, and it grew increasingly strange and difficult to visualize the pink-and-white faces of our friends rising out of bundles of clothes.

The Netherland East Indian Government struggled to amalgamate its subjects here and there in order to keep track of their numbers and their behaviour; the subjects acceded to this plan only with reservations. They could not understand why they should live in villages open to the glare of the equatorial sun, where the sandflies which did not exist in the cool green jungle light plagued them unmercifully. Nor did they see why they should build decorative fences along the muddy paths, nor be always constructing houses for the native magistrate, the Guru, and the police whom they emphatically had not invited there.

Every once in so often they returned to home base and stayed around awhile. But the jungle trails were always calling them, and they grew fretful and restless if they lingered long in one place. Each family generally had a house at some garden site. Various members would inhabit this from time to time, long enough to eat up the corn crop and pluck a fresh supply of tobacco leaves. Then the wanderlust in their blood would urge them on again to follow their food, their business, and their inclinations wherever they might lead.

Sainke Doek had one unfailing attraction, not only for the Madik, but for all the neighbouring tribes as well. It is famous throughout the region for its sago swamp. For miles around the untidy sago palms rise out of yellow swampy water. As you approach, a bewildering maze of little paths beckon you in all directions, for pigs and Papuans alike repair there for their food. On every little oasis of dry ground crumbles a crude stick and palm-leaf shelter where sago-seekers at some time slept. Whenever we went there we slipped and floundered over roots and fallen logs invisible through the muddy water lapping around our knees. Once, and once only, I tried to steady myself by reaching out for the trunk of a near-by sago palm. From then on I felt that a ducking was a desirable alternative to the stiletto thrust of thorns in my hand.

A distant persistent tapping in one direction — a loud crash in another — both steps in the arduous search for subsistence. A man has felled and split open a sago palm — not for himself, but, by a system of indirect nourishment, as bait for pig. By day the pigs root and sleep on higher ground. By night, full of thievery, they prowl, trampling into meagre gardens, wallowing in the sago swamp. What could compare as pig trough to half a palm trunk bursting



with its own fodder? By moonlight the man returns, creeping, spear in hand, and so noisily do pigs attack their sago, he is scarcely ever heard. The penalty of gluttony in this case is death.

The Madik says: 'We live just like the pig. When the lansa fruit is ripe we move to the forest and make our little house. When the corn is ready, we move to the garden to eat it. When a palm tree is felled, we move to the swamp until it is empty.'

In the swamp, however, he causes himself a great deal more trouble than does his brother pig. Many people refer casually to sago as easygoing Nature's most labour-saving gift to man. 'How simple,' they say, 'merely to fell a tree and there is food for weeks. All that is necessary is to scoop out the pith. No wonder the Papuans are lazy.'

It is true that all that is necessary is to scoop out the pith, sluice and strain it in a series of troughs, and then carry the residue home. But with the tools at their disposal these operations were interminable, back-breaking, exigent of muscle and of persistence. Most Papuans leave everything but the felling of the tree to the women. The chivalrous Madik, however, consider the pounding of the pith too strenuous for their wives and daughters, and men and women apportion the work between them. Several days' activity in the swamp provides a family with one or two 'sago mantars' — large packages tidily done up in a palm-leaf corset, which are consumed by relatives and friends in a very short time indeed.

Once the tree is chopped down the trunk is split in two, and a palm-leaf shelter erected over it to keep out the sun. Here two old men sit on sticks laid across the half-trunks like thwarts in a canoe. Regularly and indefatigably their bamboo mallets come down, scooping out at each stroke a

modicum of the solid, tough-fibred pith. Perspiration streams down their faces and their backs. Every once in a while one of them stops for a moment or two to get his breath, rest his aching muscles, and light the cigarette stub tucked behind his ear for a few puffs. Attracted by the pungent sago smell, flies and midges gather in swarms and hang like clouds before their eyes. On the same little island of dry ground the women sit around, chatting and smoking, waiting for a basketful of pith to strain. A girl rises from the leaf on which she has been sitting, stretches, and walks slowly over to a half-filled basket. She steps into it and stamps down the contents with her broad splayed feet in order to make room for more. A woman is trimming one of the branches of the fallen tree to serve as a trough. A few giggling girls are desultorily scooping the pounded pith out of the horizontal trunk and patting it into their baskets. Eventually each wanders off to her own arrangement of upper and lower troughs where the pith is dumped, sluiced with the yellow swamp water caught up in a bark bucket, kneaded and pressed against a bark-cloth sieve so that only the fine, flour-like pith filters through. At the bottom of the lower trough a glutinous white substance clings — the Papuan staff of life.

For all its usefulness, sago is not an attractive form of food. 'Tastelessness' I know to be a negative attribute implying simply an absence of flavour, but in the case of sago it seems possessed of a devastatingly positive value. The unfortunate Madik have not even salt to lend it savour, and the grey jelly formed by mixing it with boiling water, or the limestone blocks into which it is roasted in its leaf covering, are a miracle of insipidity.

The whole scheme of Madik and Moraid life necessitates a lot of travel, even should they care to stay at home. They are not a people who plan for tomorrow. While there is food they eat it up with enthusiasm and abandon. When the garden is stripped they move on to greener pastures, to another planted clearing, or to the friendly palms of the sago swamp. They live from day to day, generously sharing with whoever comes along the fruits of their spasmodic labours. When they are ill their restlessness increases. A sick person must travel ceaselessly through the forest, sleeping each night in a new and different shelter, for should he remain in one place the house becomes hot and full of sickness, crowded with the malevolent powers that hold him in thrall. When a young man wishes to marry, he must travel for months here and there collecting the marriage cloth demanded by his future father-in-law. When a man dies, his relations must spend weary days and years assembling his cloth wealth and exhibit it to the ghost, that he may rest in peace. So a man's home is where his sleeping mat is; his heart is a portable object in his stomach.

This constant shift of environment, this hand-to-mouth existence, leads to an emotional adaptability among the Madik. They speak proudly of their gardens, but they do not care to stay in them; affectionately of their wives, but they frequently leave them. Mothers cannot tote more than one child at a time around with them; often one is left behind in charge of an aunt, a brother, or another slightly older child. For this reason their 'love of the land' is not specific, but includes the whole familiar jungle; their affection for people seldom centres acutely on one human being — it is dispersed among a large part of their tribe.

The Madik tribe is divided into what might be called clans — large family groups claiming descent from a com-

mon ancestor or ancestress. These clan groups involve no marriage restrictions; a man can choose a wife from within his own clan, or from another one, according to his inclinations and affections. The only rules are obedience to the clan tabus — where they exist — and a certain allegiance to the clan headman. What native civil authority there is resides in him, though actually his power is largely advisory. Like the late League of Nations, he has no means of enforcing his decrees. But he is chosen because of his superior wisdom and knowledge, so that his advice carries the weight of tradition, of legal precedent. Often the son of a previous headman is elected as successor to his father; for who, the Madik say, has a better opportunity of acquiring the necessary knowledge than one brought up so near the fount? The Madik call these headmen 'Bai Shie,' which means 'He who talks big' — a confirmation that their influence depends on the efficacy of their arguments.

There are six of these clans among the Madik, though only three were represented at Sainke Doek. According to their own accounts, two of the three originated there. The third, the Mialin, has, however, the sanction of priority in the region. Gracefully dodging the problem of original creation, they maintain that the first Mialin man and woman arrived at Mega by prahu from the island of Biak in Geelvink Bay. Coming straight from the coast to Sainke Doek, the Mialin ancestors were delighted with its endless sago swamp, its cool streams of limpid water chocked with fish, freshwater shrimp, and eels; they decided that they need seek no farther, for they had reached their Promised Land.

They had a great advantage over most first couples, for they had conveniently brought the arts of living with them from Biak. They had no need to invent a means of conjur-

ing fire from a spark, of lashing a house together, or of fashioning weapons and utensils, and the knowledge of good and evil was already theirs. Their first child was a daughter, and the second a son. The mother buried the umbilical cords of the two children on the bank of the Saim stream, and from them two great Waringen trees grew up with the years. In these trees the life and strength of the Mialin clan continue to reside, and should anything happen to them, the Mialin believe they all must perish.

The second clan to put in an appearance in Sainke Doek was the Yakwam. One day after a great rain some Mialin people discovered a woman imbedded up to her waist in the earth near the sago swamp.

‘What are you? A witch?’ one asked breathlessly, but the women gave no sign.

‘Are you a Moraid woman, or a Moi?’ asked another, but still the woman did not move.

‘Are you a woman from the sky who slid to the earth in this last rain?’ a third person inquired. The woman raised her head and looked at them, and they knew then that this must be the truth. So they dug her out and carried her home with them, and they could see that she was heavy with child. They offered her food but she did not accept it, for she ate only the wild ginger root that grows in the forest. She was very beautiful and they called her ‘Ngon-Gu’ — ‘The Sky Woman.’ A Mialin man fell in love with her, and shortly after their marriage she gave birth to the child she had carried with her from the sky.

One day she went deep into the jungle in search of the wild ginger on which she subsisted, and which she also fed to Wuli, her son. She left Wuli behind with her husband’s sister, and as the child watched her cook yams and bananas he begged for some. The woman refused at first, but

Ngon-Gu was gone for so long and Wuli became so insistent that finally she allowed him a few tidbits. For this reason, when Ngon-Gu's appointed time came and she climbed up the ladder of the rain again to the sky, she left behind her the celestially begotten child who had eaten mortal food. The motherless Wuli grew up and married a Mialin girl, and their children were called Yakwam, which means 'Children of the Rain.' The grove where Ngon-Gu fell to the earth is called Kalamamu, and the Yakwam clan keep it tidied of dead leaves and guard the trees with care, for the death of one of the trees means a death in the clan.

It was some time after this that a Yakwam man married a Mialin woman (always considered a very fitting alliance), and she surprisingly gave birth to a small white pig and a baby girl in rapid succession. The white pig, as soon as it was old enough to be independent, took to the jungle, but the girl remained to grow up and marry a Mialin man. Their progeny was called the Sala clan; it is only logical that the killing or eating of the white bush pig, their revered great-uncle, is to them strictly tabu. The whiteness of this pig had other startling consequences. One of his nieces, to her consternation, one day produced a white baby, and they say that thenceforward an albino was born in every generation.

The Madik are perhaps a trifle unusual in that they prefer the society of their own relations to all others. Acting on this assumption, a man divides the world of human animals into two distinct categories, sharply demarcated in his mind and in his behaviour toward them. There are 'my people' and 'other people.'

'My people' are all those related to him by the tie of blood, for as far afield as he can trace it and including all of his clan. Inherited trading partners, or San, are also in this

group. With all these the bond is a very strong one, so strong that little distinction is made in actual degree of relationship. For the Madik have, like many primitive peoples, a classificatory system of relationship terms. That is, the word 'mother' (Madik 'im') is used by a man indiscriminately when referring to his own mother, her sister, her brother's wife, his father's brother's wife, or some older female trading partner. Brothers and sisters have even broader ramifications, embracing all varieties of cousins except cross-cousins, and all San of a man's own generation. With the use of these terms of intimate relationship go the corresponding feelings, so that each individual, in a land where death strikes often and old age is seldom attained, is always somewhere supplied with all the essential ingredients of a family.

The rest of the world consists of 'other people.' Of course, some of these may well be a man's familiar friends, men with whom he lived in the initiation house, people of the same general locality, members of other closely affiliated clans, or friends of friends. But a complete stranger is always a potential enemy, inspiring not so much hatred as suspicion and fear. He is capable of theft, evil magic, or murder at sight. The safest thing to do, unless he has a proper introduction of sorts, is to kill him before he kills you. This distinction between 'relatives' and strangers is more than a question of relationship or even of affection. It is the difference between confidence and mistrust, between safety and danger.

In the confines of their dim green world, the Madik have little need for a more systematic regulation of their lives. The jungle 'opens wide its hands,' as they say, and gives them freely of its bountiful supplies. It furnishes them with food and the materials for their houses; it gives them rattan

and fibres and grasses to weave and bind; bamboo and cane for their utensils, knives, and spear blades; pandanus for their mats and rain capes; bark for their scanty clothing; palm beer for their inebriation. Why should they look further? Why cultivate in themselves the desire for more? They have no need of a time for planting and a time for harvesting, for equatorial Nature gives little indication of her changing moods; only sometimes it rains a little more and sometimes a little less.

The lack of seasonal change leads to another simplification. There is no means and therefore no need of keeping track of the passage of time. As the ages have stood still here, so do months and weeks and years; tossed indiscriminately to one side, they no longer fetter the conduct of affairs. Ask two Papuans when some past event occurred. One will hazard a month ago, the other thoughtfully suggest six years. For them only today, yesterday, and tomorrow have a meaning or a use. We were hardly aware of the gradual demise of time in our own consciousness. When the approximately monthly mail arrived by carrier we never thought of noticing the dates. They were so far past they meant nothing in any case, and in dating our replies we picked arbitrarily any day that came into our heads. I remember that I favoured January for some time and then, realizing it couldn't last forever, suddenly switched to August.

A corollary to the neglect of time is the absence of age. No one ever has the slightest idea how old he is. Once I asked a toothless greybeard, 'How old are you?'

He plunged into meditation for a moment and then answered brightly, 'Maybe twelve.'

The Madik have raised no barrier between themselves and the benefits the jungle lavishes upon them. But un-



fortunately the Rain Forest is not a purely beneficent power. Through the same channels which so well supply their material needs come many less pleasing gifts. Malaria, in the fever-ridden swamps and perpetual mud-holes of rain, battens on its victims, shaking their naked bodies with its chills, bloating their spleens, cumulatively undermining their strength, sometimes driving them insane. Yaws eat up their healthy flesh, penetrating to their bones and distorting them. Other tropical diseases, including occasional leprosy, emaciate them, and skin diseases cause their skin to slough off in ruffled patterns. Hunger, nurtured on man's improvidence, stalks the Madik from childhood on, for all the abundance of tropical forests and sago swamp. Tempestuous rains beat their gardens to the ground and wild pigs plunder them. Game is scarce or dangerous. Weakened by insufficient nourishment, by illnesses and the treatments for them, and perhaps by their own beliefs and fears, only a few children out of many grow up, and practically no one survives to grow old.

We chose to think that it was the desire to supplement their uncertain diet rather than any innate ferocity which made cannibals of the Madik. Even so, they never hunted down a human being, like a cassowary, for the cuts of meat he would provide. They killed only people accused of anti-social behaviour — the breaking of a tabu or wilful murder; for them the spear functioned as jail and electric chair. The percentage of murders was indeed inordinately high, but that was because there were so many ways of killing people by black magic and spells. Once an individual or two had been dispatched in the cause of justice, it would have been shockingly wasteful for half-starved warriors to neglect a fine supply of fresh meat, even though it did happen to be human. Not that they had the slightest compunction about

it; on the contrary, they considered it the best food obtainable, and so it probably was. A few years in New Guinea without benefit of gun or canned corned beef might well turn almost anyone into a cannibal.

Not only are there physical dangers to beset the Madik; there are supernatural ones as well. Unfortunately for his peace of mind, man is cursed with an imagination. By scientific processes too deep for the layman to follow we have recently begun to discover bacteria, germs, and parasites as the causes for the breakdown of the human body in illness and in death. The Madik has no microscope and no laboratory; here he must still rely on his imagination. So he has manufactured an invisible world with witches slaving to dine on human souls, and the ghosts of the dead who often kill solitary trespassers on their preserves. At the same time he grants to mankind mysterious magical powers which can cause a whole textbook of diseases, from slight complaints to fatal ones.

There are, of course, times when there is no emergency on hand to explain. Then man's imagination must conjure up something for its exercise and entertainment. The Madik have chosen for their most venturesome flights of fancy the realm of economics, which they have raised from base and purely material transactions into semi-ceremonial manoeuvres fraught with social significance.

Involved as our financial system seems to the Papuans, their own economic arrangements would, in some ways, put a Wall Street broker to shame. Of course, ordinary household wants and products are obtained by barter. If Akar wants an axe to clear some garden land, he makes a particularly fine fish trap, a long tubular black one. This he takes to Selenek and trades to a Moraid friend for a young cassowary which obediently follows him home, whistling as it

goes. Near Sainke Doek he collects some dammar, the resin from the New Guinea dammara tree which is used all over the world for varnishes. Carrying the dammar-resin and clucking to the cassowary, he walks down to Mega on the coast. A coastal man can sell the dammar to a passing Chinese trader and raise the mountain cassowary until it is big enough for a worth-while feast. After due consideration it is highly probable that he will acquire these commodities from Akar for a ninety-cent axe blade.

The Madik are no more interested in this sort of transaction than we are in buying groceries from the corner store. Not only does their main interest centre in another sort of trade entirely, but obliquely every important event of their social lives is also inextricably bound up with it. Years and years ago, probably in the days of the flourishing bird of paradise trade or an even earlier selling of slaves, there percolated into the most remote inland parts of the district around us beautifully woven and often embroidered strips of cloth from the islands of Ternate and Tidore far to the west, the seat of the empire of those powerful old rascals, the Sultans of Tidore. To the Madik, the Moraid, and their neighbours, unused to any sort of cloth save what they themselves beat out of tree bark, this cloth was beautiful beyond their wildest dreams. Far too valuable to use — and what could they use it for anyway? — it became for them the coin of the realm, the collector's gem, the proudest possession of the clan. About it they wove a string of names for every colour and every design.

Each family has its own particular pieces of cloth, or 'Mle,' handed down from father to son since what is to them time immemorial. A distinction is made between these inherited pieces and others that may pass through a man's hands, lending the value of prestige without the fervent

sense of ownership. Simultaneously with his Mle a man also inherits from his father a group of trade friends, or 'San,' as they call them, scattered here and there throughout a wide area. His San have other trading partners in other directions, so that a spiderweb of these peculiar connections is superimposed over all the solid divisions of families, of clans, and even of tribes among the Madik and Moraid. San have one chief purpose and function, and that is the mutual borrowing and lending of cloth. Other people may exchange pieces of cloth outright, after carefully measuring them to make sure they are the identical size. But with a San one is always in the position of creditor or debtor.

Mle is the very mainspring of Madik life. No one can get married, name a child, or die without benefit of Mle. Every man inherits his original quota, as I have said, from his father, but, like a shareholder in a South African gold mine, he seldom actually sees his property. For his father, and his father's father before him, have farmed out the Mle to trade friends all over the country. Then, when a piece of cloth is necessary in the family, he can go to one of these San and ask for one back again, though the chances of its being the identical Mle given to the San years ago are extremely remote. The San would have used it long ago to pay off a debt to a San of his own or to placate his father-in-law. So, with the inheritance on paper, so to speak, of Mle, a man also inherits a generation of debts and credits from his father's San, who now, with their children, become his own.

When a young man comes of age, he is sent on a good-will tour to meet all his father's San and their families. A wise and prosperous father furnishes the stripling with one or two Mle to distribute to creditor San, whereas debtor San are, in turn, supposed to show their recognition of a new 'brother'

or 'son' by giving him Mle with which to face life and matrimony. Women have San as well, since they are inherited by families, and occasionally they also have Mle, but it is of less importance to them because it is they and not the men who are a purchasable commodity.

There are a great many incidental stages in a Mle transaction. Uwo, a San of Sejak's father, may go to Sejak in Sejut and say:

'My father gave your grandfather a "Mle Bukik." Now I want it, or another one as big as it, back again.'

That is the signal for Sejak to set out to find a Mle to return to the importunate Uwo. He travels to Luelala, where he has another San, a Moraid man.

'When your first child was named I gave you a Mle. Now I want one in return to give to Uwo.'

The Moraid scratches his head and answers: 'But I have no Mle. I gave that one to my brother to pay for his wife.'

'Well, then,' says Sejak, 'since you owe me a Mle, you get one from a San of yours.'

After considerable argument and persuasion the Moraid man starts off to see a San of his in Selenek. His Selenek San also has no Mle, but is owed one by a man in Swailbe. The Luelala man cajoles the Selenek man into travelling to Swailbe, where, after three or four months of negotiation, he succeeds in obtaining the Mle owed to him.

He returns triumphantly but secretively to Selenek, as much a prey to nervous distrust as a bank messenger with thousands of dollars in his bag. Once arrived, he is not eager to part too soon with his precious possession and delays a long time, revelling in sensations of wealth and importance, before he sends a message to the Luelala man that he has a Mle for him. And so on ad infinitum.

It can be seen that the acquisition of a Mle requires infinite patience and tenacity. And as the Madik are indifferent to the passage of time, it has occasionally happened that a man has spent his declining years and finally died in foreign territory waiting for a San to procure him a Mle. For this reason many more Mle transactions are talked about than are ever consummated. Some people, however, are considered more skilful than others in the pursuit of cloth. The most flattering thing that can be said of a Madik is that he is 'mambhut' — a man successful in acquiring Mle and consequently prompt in his payment of debts. Conversely 'bhut,' applied to the man who gets no Mle and makes no effort to do so, is a term of opprobrium. We did notice that almost every man had a tendency to refer to himself as the one 'Mambhut' in a world of slovenly 'Bhuts.' When the talk drifted to the younger generation, the old men would shake their heads.

'When I was young I was "Mambhut,"' said Ungolo. 'I got much Mle and I paid ten "Mle Toba" for my wife Siwok. I paid five to her father and brothers when we were married, and when Komuri was born I got two more to give Komuri her first name and to soften the hearts of Siwok's family. Then I raised a pig, and fed him on sago and corn. When he was big and fat I called all my San to come. We killed the pig and I cut him in eight pieces and for each piece one of my San gave me a Mle. But now,' said Ungolo disgustedly, 'all the young men are "bhut." Yabaisham, who lived with Termit, he never got any Mle. And Slomsli wants to marry Komuri. He has been away a long, long time chasing Mle, but he has not brought me any. Komuri's child will be born before he has paid me.'

In justice to Slomsli it must be said that his assignment was anything but simple. As though the ordinary acquisi-

tion of Mle were not difficult enough, the Madik add an extra complication when it comes to getting married.

‘The price for Komuri,’ Ungolo had said to Slomsli, ‘is the ten “Mle Toba” which I paid to Siwok’s father when I married her.’

Of course these were the identical pieces which Siwok’s father had paid out to her mother’s family, and so up a zig-zag path the genealogy of marriage Mle wanders back into the dim mists of antiquity through the female line. The well-intentioned Slomsli has a formidable task before him. First he must travel far and wide to visit his various San, striving to soften their hearts that they may give him Mle — any kind of Mle. These he must acquire as a starter or basis of operations. Then, through his San, San’s San, and other people’s San, he must farm these out in order to secure, in return for them, the identical red ‘Mle Toba’ which Ungolo, years ago, paid to Siwok’s father for the privilege of marrying her.

Provided this were all done properly, Slomsli would have died of old age long before he could be legally united with Komuri. So, adapting themselves to circumstances, parents are generally lenient enough to accept one or two pieces of cloth as a first down payment, leaving the rest to trickle in on the installment plan through the years. At the birth of every child Slomsli must produce one of these cloths to give the child a name and to placate his family-in-law, who might otherwise claim the child as substitute payment. Daughters are, of course, invaluable, for it is only by marrying them off that a man can ever reimburse himself for all he has spent on his wife.

When a man dies his ghost can only rest when its own particular Mle have been brought in from every direction by footsore relations and opened up on his grave. This

actually is the only time when one individual's wealth is all assembled at the same place and at the same time; no wonder that it soothes the ghost into a proud and happy after-life.

Mle is an agent of justice as well, for all fines and indemnities must be paid in it. In fact, all crimes and misdemeanours, sometimes including murder, can generally be expiated through this medium. Because it is so difficult to obtain and so incredibly valuable, Mle often acts as a distinct deterrent to anti-social behaviour. If a man is caught being unfaithful to his wife with another man's wife, for instance, he finds himself involved in an almost hopeless financial tangle. There are two courses open to him. Either he must calm his own indignant wife and her family with liberal donations of Mle, and placate the offended husband of his paramour in the same way before he can revert to things as they were; or, if he chooses to marry the lady with whom he has had the affair, he must pay a large cloth alimony to his first wife, another one to his new wife's ex-husband, and then a regular marriage portion to the woman's family. This the latter insist upon because they must return the marriage cloth paid by the first husband, the marriage having been dissolved through their daughter's fault. Under these circumstances a man probably thinks at least twice before bankrupting himself in adultery.

Aside from the purely practical advantages in his favour, there is an aura of glamour and prestige emanating from a man with a Mle. Though it may not be essential to any project of the moment, it gives him infinite delight to fondle it and croon over it for a time in secret. But he will never keep it long in his possession unless it happens to be one of the inherited family pieces. Its value to him lies entirely in the fact that with it he can satisfy a creditor of long stand-



ing or, more desirable still, transform an ordinary San into a debtor. In a San's hands his Mle is the equivalent of money in the savings bank which can be drawn on whenever an emergency arises. The Madik are always eager to get a Mle but never to hoard it; its usefulness lies in its being kept in circulation.

Considering the general level on which the Madik live, it is curious to discover the important rôle played by transactions in a useless article of artificially sustained value like Mle. Can it be inferred that the establishment of a system of credit is a very fundamental urge of mankind; that a people must be primitive indeed to be satisfied with simple barter as the sole means of exchange? Perhaps we are not entirely to be blamed for our subservience to it if the instinct for high finance, for the creation, acquisition, and manipulation of some kind of wealth, is one of the elemental distinctions between man and the ape.

The choice of a medium of exchange is, of course, the first step, and it has been various the world over, from cattle to shells, from hoes to rock salt, from precious metals to blankets. Some of these by their own consistency are restricted to specific semi-ceremonial transactions. An East African native, for instance, would have difficulty breaking a cow up into pennies. Like the cow, the Madik Mle cannot be considered as true currency. A man's personal Mle is more like a bond which, though it changes hands, continues to belong to him and his family wherever it may be. Unlike a bond, it pays him no interest; its intrinsic value cannot be increased or decreased.

The Madik have been rather unfortunate in their only available medium. The enormous stone mill wheels of the Yap islanders, for instance, are practically imperishable; even the one which sank to the bottom of the sea can still

be used in ritual exchanges. But cloth grows old and fragile; even now Mle has become distressingly rare. No matter how tenderly the owner wraps it in a pandanus-leaf envelope or a grub cocoon, time, humidity and cockroaches are reducing it to shreds.

Realizing its importance to the natives, we managed to acquire two pieces from Sorong. They were modern exports from Makassar, very different in quality from the old pieces, but nonetheless acceptable to the recipients. However, it is unlikely that a Madik would ever get to Sorong, much less with eight guilders in his cheek. Perhaps the infiltration of the Government and the guilder may save the economic and social situation, eventually make possible the marriage of clothless young men, and ward off the rancour of vindictive, irascible ghosts.

Though the hardships of his life may appear, in our eyes, to outnumber the advantages, this is not so in the estimation of the Madik. No matter what tragedies befall him, no matter how bitter the disappointments in his life, because it is his nature to do so, everyone has a wonderful time while it lasts. This indomitable, high-spirited gaiety is the characteristic which lends colour to the Madik, which runs through their lives like a golden thread. They possess the supreme gift of laughter, a laughter which convulses their whole bodies, which pours out of them like a rushing mountain torrent and even in sorrow and misfortune will not be denied. It is great and careless laughter; no trace of bitterness, no question, no slightest reservation trespasses on that Gargantuan mirth.

# Five

## Housekeeping on stilts

HOUSEKEEPING at Sainke Doek was of a beautiful simplicity. To begin with, neatness was hardly any problem at all. Owing to the sieve-like construction of furniture and floors, any spilling at meals, usually indecorous, could be done so tidily as almost to become a social grace. An upset cup of coffee drained quickly and spotlessly through the table and the floor, splashing innocuously onto the ground beneath us. Bits of food, toppling from forks held in quinine-shaken hands, dropped like plums to be garnered by the young cassowary who made his headquarters below. Ashes, pencil shavings, dust and all other flotsam and jetsam followed this self-disposal system, nor need I elucidate the advantages involved in maintaining four pet lories, a parrot, a cockatoo, and an unhousebroken tree-kangaroo.

Nothing is ever quite perfect in life, so besides the things we did not want around, a number of the things we did also went through the floor. It was very difficult to keep everything always in a proper position, vertical to the open lines of our interior. Pencils, knives, toothbrushes, bandages, fishhooks, fountain pens, spools of thread, and rolls of film always seemed to be dropping away. Fortunately the Papuan children showed a lively archaeological interest in our open basement. Every morning two or three black, pot-bellied little urchins would appear at the top of our ladder, their hands full of assorted treasures. What still

looked attractive to us we kept; the more damaged specimens served as rewards.

The enormous open front veranda served as living-room, dining-room and workshop. When it rained in on one side, we simply moved to the other, and if one strip of the sago palm-leaf roof began to leak, it was an easy matter to lay another one over the holes. We led, in fact, an *al fresco* existence. Even the floor, when no breath of air stirred horizontally, always afforded a certain amount of perpendicular ventilation. When the clouds of biting midges which grazed on us during the day drove us to the border of insanity, we could light a smudge under the floor, although frequently, if the wind were in the wrong direction, clouds of yellow smoke billowing up around us quickly brought us to the tearful decision that midge bites were, after all, quite endurable.

Our staff consisted principally of Martin. There was also Evart, but he hardly counted except as an irritant to Martin. When Evart was a baby his mother and father had been killed in a cannibal raid and Evart had been carried off as booty — rather a poor prize, we used to think. Eventually he was traded to, or purchased by, a minor chieftain near Sorong. When the Netherland East Indian Government began investigating cases of captured children, they took Evart away from the chief and gave him to an Amboinese mission teacher to bring up.

Evart was consequently reared as a God-fearing Christian, full of intellectual contempt for the heathen members of his race, but also full of respectful physical fear. Because of this emotion he was not eager to go among his brethren in Sainke Doek and we were certainly not eager to have him, but we were firmly instructed to take two men, one as a spare when the other was sick, and one to keep the other

company in a strange land. For the first reason we were glad we had brought Evart. When Martin had malaria Evart could cook rice and corned beef, without élan, to be sure, but adequately. The sociable angle did not work out so well. Three days after we arrived in Sainke Doek Martin and Evart had a fight and never exchanged another word during the next seven months. We never blamed the fight on Evart, for Martin had a great capacity for hatred.

Besides keeping out of Martin's way, Evart made our beds extremely badly and did our laundry in the stream. He managed to stretch the washing of our scanty wardrobe into a full week's work, for fear, I suppose, that were it once finished some other occupation would be found for him. On Monday a higgledy-piggledy pile of sheets, shorts, pareus, and pillowcases would be set to soak in kerosene tins for two days. This insured that everything white would be spottily dyed with the colours that ran from other things. Wednesday and Thursday were devoted to splashing and pounding in the stream. On Friday the conglomeration of dripping garments was hung on lines beside the house. A few hours of sunlight would have dried them effectively, but here Nature co-operated with Evart. It rained some time or other every day, and he always arranged to be simulating slumber when the downpour began so that there should be no danger of his bringing the wash in before it was thoroughly soaked. Piled in a sodden heap once more, the drabber objects had a second chance of absorbing mottled rainbow hues from their gayer fellows. By Sunday morning Evart and the weather managed to have the laundry dry. Sunday was therefore devoted to folding wrinkled clothes and sheets and laying them in nondescript piles on our cots. By Monday morning he was ready to begin again.

Martin was an army in himself. He had the sort of

efficiency that only New Guinea could produce, for it was bred and nurtured on New Guinea problems. He could count carriers with a casual glance and keep track of their loads; he produced cold lunches and packed them up in the early morning dark while he cooked breakfast, washed dishes, took down our beds, and collapsed the furniture; he found fresh fruit where none appeared to grow, and stole or wheedled vegetables when we expressed a desire for them. Out of Chinese ketchup and coconut oil he could create sauces which would have done credit to a French chef, and he always carried, tucked about him somewhere, the 'mama roti' <sup>1</sup> with which to bake us crisp fresh bread. Before we learnt Malay he instinctively understood our every request, no matter in what language it was couched, and could in turn make clear to us the meaning of the most abstract words. In fact, in our early days he was interpreter, nurse, and bodyguard to us.

In spite of all this there were times when we became very irritated with Martin; for no apparent reason he would often brood and sulk for days on end. His face seemed to be entirely featureless; it was an empty plain whereon his expressions took their stance. Nothing was more thunderous than his brooding face, nothing more dazzling than his smile. He seemed so superhumanly intelligent that we were always astounded and amused when he told us tales of black magic, of mysterious poisonings and witchcraft. Possibly we were wrong to laugh, for everyone in New Guinea tells these tales, and perhaps, in the miasma of the swamps and the tangled creepers of the jungle, or in the harsh wild breath of the northwest monsoon, inscrutable things may come to pass, strange blossoms springing from the fertile soil.

Over the kitchen, which was connected with the rest of

<sup>1</sup> 'Bread mother,' a mixture of coconut milk and lime juice.

the house by a rickety corridor, Martin ruled like a mediaeval despot. In spite of the great contempt he had for Papuans, the place was always bulging with them, and they earned many times over the tidbits of food sometimes vouchsafed them. A New Guinea stove consists of a shelf on which a thick layer of earth has been laid. On two or three little circles of stones the iron pots and tin<sup>1</sup> oven are propped over glowing coals. To keep the fires at exactly the right temperature someone has to feed them a twig at a time — enough to keep the coals going, but not enough to make a flame. While Martin sat on the floor all morning washing and kneading the daily rice, his acolytes chopped wood into slivers and fed and blew on his little fires, as nervous as vestal virgins of their being extinguished.

The storeroom for our perishable foods was the kitchen ceiling. From it hung bunches of bananas, rolls of sago, sections of smoked and sun-dried pig carcass, safely out of reach of marauding rats. With every passing breeze these suspended edibles waved slowly to and fro, creaking on their strings, causing in all but the smallest Papuans a rhythmic ducking of their heads.

Besides Martin and Evart we maintained two 'water boys,' who hauled our water supply in kerosene tins from the stream about a quarter of a mile from the house. Besides this menial duty they also served as informants, interpreters, pig-beaters, and decoys. We paid them ten Dutch cents a day and fed them three square meals, so the position was mildly popular.

All our problems of housekeeping were blissfully light. There was no buying of food; months ago it had all been bought. As for ordering meals, Martin knew as well as I did that we would have coffee and toast for breakfast, rice and

<sup>1</sup> A kerosene tin laid on its side.

corned beef for lunch unless there were pig. The only domestic effort required of me was to enter the godown and pick out, by the light of Martin's lamp, the can of soup that we would have for supper, and to decide whether dessert should take the form of Bartlett pears or yellow clingstone peaches.

There was an occasional bit of marketing which in the beginning I transacted at ease on the front porch. Natives would bring in a few superfluous fruits and vegetables from their gardens when they were particularly eager for one of our trade goods. I soon waived this opportunity, for the papayas I purchased seemed always to be rotten, the ears of corn those that had been kept as seedlings for the next crop, and Martin's severely reproachful gaze drove me to sending all the vendors to the back door. This they hated. Martin was a hard bargainer and I was an easy one. Besides that, they soon got over being frightened of Freddy and me, but never of Martin. I think he strove to the best of his ability to make up for the lack of superior dignity of his employers and their senseless preoccupation with the Papuan people.

One day two children came to see us. They were always hungry, so I stole surreptitiously into the godown and brought them back two bananas. Before they had finished them Martin came out on the veranda with our tea. Kam whispered quickly to Bilek and they both hid their bananas behind their backs.

'What were you saying?' I asked them when Martin had gone.

'I told Bilek,' said Kam, 'that we must hide the bananas from Martin. If he knew the Nunya had given them to us he would be angry with her. Even perhaps he might beat her.'

I loved life in New Guinea. Sometimes, when I remember



certain phases of it, I wonder why. The flaw was not in our cannibal friends, of whom I was extremely fond, nor the heat and humidity and mud, nor the fact that what are ordinarily considered the comforts of life were conspicuous by their absence. It was not that we had malaria continuously, and not that we had too little to eat; it was not the swarms of midges which made the days hideous, nor the leeches that dropped on us from the jungle leaves.

Even the rats were endurable, though they definitely rated as a nuisance. More rats come out of the New Guinea jungle than from all the wharves, the attics, and the sinking ships in the world. They were especially playful at night, running across our mosquito nets, knocking things off our table, eating holes in our best baskets and our soap. The noise they made during these manoeuvres was not conducive to sleep. Not only did they scamper loudly around the room, but they persisted in knocking over cans of food in the storeroom next to us while they dived hopefully for the bananas hanging from the ceiling, or scrabbled at the bags of rice.

If we had not been safely tucked under our mosquito nets at night we might have been more than inconvenienced by the rats. They made life miserable for the natives. The Madik simply stretch out on their sleeping mats at night, on the floor or on the raised platform over their long fireplaces. Blankets, nets, any sort of covering, are unknown to them. All their food, their baskets and other possessions they hang from the roof by rattan to keep them out of the reach of rats. This makes the rats angry and hungry. They take their revenge and their nourishment at the same time by chewing the feet of the sleeping inhabitants.

At first we could hardly believe this was possible. It sounded suspiciously like the tale of the man who never

knew his foot was in the fire until he smelt the odour of burning flesh. However, once we had seen some mangled toes and well-gnawed soles, we were convinced.

‘Why don’t you wake up when they bite you?’ we asked.

‘Of course I wake up,’ each man said. ‘I wake up and drive one away and when I go to sleep again he comes back and takes another bite. What can I do?’

We had brought with us for some unknown emergency a long strip of canvas. I began experimenting with it and found that I could turn out very tough and rather elegant bed socks or bootees, which I made to order for those natives who looked as though one more session with the rats would actually amputate something. As the canvas was striped green and yellow they made a terrific hit, and I was besieged by requests for these unusual adornments. By being so beautiful the bootees unfortunately defeated their own purpose. Instead of reserving them as rat armour the proud owners strutted about everywhere in them, and in a short time only a few muddy tatters remained as evidence of my cobbling.

In spite of the rats, however, the hardships of New Guinea boiled down to only one thing for me and that not a very exotic or dramatic one. What I really could not bear was the cockroaches. They rose well above the category of mere pests, a sharp and ever-constant reminder that some day the insects must rule the world. They were not the sort of thing that makes you blush when a stranger walks into your pantry. They were a sea of shiny brown backs around us. Not only the common or garden cockroach flourished there, but also a larger member of the family — a spotted beast about two inches long whose movements were heavy and slow and whose tastes ran exclusively to paper. Because he was so lethargic he was less annoying, in spite of his loath-

some appearance. But it was the familiar kitchen cockroach that was the bane of our lives. When first we took up residence we noticed a few about, and felt shame at having introduced the little brother of western civilization from the *Chiva* into Papua. Soon we discovered we were not to blame. They must have marched in phalanxes to our house from the jungle. Once there they multiplied so fast that we wondered apprehensively if they planned to leave any room for us. Militantly they occupied every sort of container, the native boxes in which we stored our clothes, the cigarette tins which we used for odds and ends, boxes of writing paper, of medicines, rolls of bandages, shoes, dressing-cases. I used to have to brace myself to open my sewing bag and reach for a thread and needle among the scurrying, panicky hordes inside it. Before we slipped into our shoes we had to shake them out. They ate my notes almost as fast as I could write them. At night they browsed on our toothbrushes, nipping off a bristle here and there. Towards the end of our stay they ran relay races around our plates as we ate.

Every once in a while I went berserk. I would collect a group of native children and start furiously emptying everything out, slapping, banging, stamping. It was a futile and unequal battle and I knew it, but at least it satisfied my frenzied lust for revenge. Their most irritating habit was gnawing at our palm-leaf roof. The holes in the roof were easily mended; it was not there the trouble lay. But from a million overfed creatures chewing steadily, digesting incessantly, a steady rain of cockroach dung pattered down below. In our hair, down our necks, in our water and our food it dropped mercilessly and regularly — the dry rain of New Guinea.

When we packed up our possessions to leave, willy-nilly we packed a few thousand cockroaches as well.

‘Wherever we go, for the rest of our lives,’ I said bitterly to Freddy, ‘we’ll be surrounded by the endless progeny of these vile roaches. Even now a new generation is growing up in my sewing bag. It’s worse than the mark of Cain. We’ll be turned out of houses and hotels. Everyone will say, “Here come the Crocketts and their cockroaches.” We’ll be ostracized by humankind.’

We were saved from this melancholy prospect by camphor. In Sorong we bought pounds of it and sprinkled it lavishly into everything we owned. The cohorts broke and systematically started an evacuation. One day with great temerity I investigated my sewing bag. Not a cockroach was in sight, not even a corpse. Where the refugees all went is a subject about which we frequently conjecture. Perhaps an invisible Pied Piper led them into the sea. Perhaps behind us we left a trail halfway around the world. Whatever happened to them, the New Guinea jungle will be as oblivious to their absence as is the beach from which a child has carried off a bucketful of sand.

# Six

## We did not live alone

AROUND our veranda hung a series of bamboo perches for our birds. Most of them were free to come and go, but we felt that each would like his own private apartment for the night, and it was far safer to have them sleep out of reach of snakes and rats. It grieves me to have to say that the idea of this ornithological collection was conceived in spite. Freddy felt that he had suffered unduly from my taste for bringing wild animals into the home. Herma Humm had been too quickly replaced by the two marsupials. Minggo, the wallaby, was a minor nuisance. During the day she kept to her own devices and her piles of leaves, and really bothered no one except for occasional onslaughts on passing bare legs. It was also amusing to hear the regular thump, thump of her hops behind us as we walked. But she developed an aversion for sleeping alone, and spent all her nights trying to get in bed with one of us for company. This habit annoyed even me, for Minggo really lacked charm, whereas sleep does not; to anyone less enthusiastic about animals it was obnoxious. Because she ate all day Minggo grew enormously fat and finally one day simply died; we suspected apoplexy.

Then there was Rebo. No animal in the world ever won my affection so completely as the little black tree-kangaroo, but she was rude and unfriendly to Freddy. So Freddy brooded over my inconsiderate acquisition of pets and

planned a revenge. He decided that I didn't like birds, so he would buy every bird in the market and fill the house with them.

There was only one fallacy in his plan. The reason I didn't like birds was that I had never known one intimately. Of course I had met plenty of them casually on the *Chiva*, but had not then learned the right approach to them. Every time I made a friendly advance to a bundle of feathers it bit me. Minggo and Rebo showed, I felt, far more discrimination because they bit everyone *but* me. In Sainke Doek, however, I became even more attached than Freddy to our bird collection, and derived as much childish pleasure from playing with its members as with Rebo. To Freddy's credit be it said that he was not resentful.

There was Aveco, the large white cockatoo with the golden crest. Aveco's wings were clipped here and there so that his flying was rather limited, but his two legs, with their powerful talons, took him almost any place he cared to go. When he was thirsty he climbed up the leg of the table and tapped suggestively on the green tea-kettle of boiled water, and if he was lonely or in need of attention he would climb up Freddy's or my leg, claws deeply sunk in the flesh, to perch firmly and affectionately on knee or wrist. His ordinary speech was raucous and guttural, with a slight cleft-palate effect, but when he particularly wanted someone to scratch his head for him he would croon beseechingly in the softest of childlike voices.

Late every afternoon Aveco had a calisthenic period. To make sure of an audience he advertised these activities by a series of ear-splitting screams, for it enraged him not to be admired. Then he ruffled up his crest, stretched his wings, and darted his head ferociously around, sometimes hanging almost upside down in a combination pirouette-somersault.

He had only one rather trying quality, of which I still see a few vestigial evidences, and that was his fondness for buttons. To crunch one up in his powerful beak seemed to give him tremendous satisfaction. In his greed for every last bone or pearl-shell morsel he generally uprooted all the button foundations as well, leaving a line of gaping holes in what had once been a respectable shirt-front. Drying day was a rapturous occasion for him. In spite of the most careful precautions, it was rarely that he didn't succeed in reaching the clothesline and waddle with indescribable dignity along it, buttons flying in his wake.

Sanky, our young green parrot, we had raised from a peevish ball of grey fluff. Her childhood was an amazing sample of interminable bad temper, which she expressed audibly by a running comment of disagreeable sounds, and actively by well-placed pecks. In youth she softened slightly and was only consistently petulant with Rebo. Between them there was constant and half-serious guerrilla warfare. Rebo would climb up to the rafter from which Sanky's perch was hung and haul it up hand over hand by the string. When it was nearly to the top she would let perch and Sanky drop shatteringly down again, coming up with a sharp jerk at the end of the line. Bored with her diet of green leaves, Rebo also was always trying to steal Sanky's food from her perch. Sitting on the veranda rail on her long hind legs, tail waving as counterbalance, she would reach out with her two little black hands, start the perch swaying, catch it on the back swing and immerse her face in the dish of rice or banana, in spite of Sanky's dreadful language and irate attacks.

As a matter of fact, Sanky showed a very dog-in-the-manger attitude towards her own food, for she herself much preferred to eat ours. She always joined us at breakfast for

a piece of dry toast, and the moment Martin appeared with our luncheon tray she would light on his head or shoulder and ride to the table on him, ready to make a pest of herself while we ate with one hand and shooed her off with the other.

We never tied her up at all from the moment we acquired her, and though she flew off on short excursions occasionally, she was a homebody at heart. Most of her actions spelt an active distaste for us, yet she seemed to feel we were a burdensome responsibility which she must not neglect. When I appeared on the path to the house, she would transfer her attention from one of our hanging orchid plants she was in the process of demolishing, fly towards me, and light proudly on my shoulder, squeaking endearingly. Immediately ashamed of what might be construed as a display of affection, she would snarl and peck viciously at my ear lobe. It is my firm belief that the temperament which we deplore in most people, condone in ourselves, and sometimes see in other members of the animal kingdom, is nowhere so rampant as among birds. If a bird loves you one minute, it hates you the next, and is hysterically bored the third. Self-control is unknown to them — inhibitions and repressions find no foothold in those wilful, egotistical little bodies swayed unresistingly by the full tide of their emotions.

Some birds, of course, like some people, have an emotional life of a natural and tiresome calm. The Duchess was an amiable red-and-orange parrot with one bad foot. She was never cross and never flustered. Either she was highly philosophical or basely phlegmatic or enormously old. One day, however, she had a startling and entirely unsuitable burst of energy. Taking off on her battered old wings, she flapped across our clearing to a tall tree at the edge of the



forest. Once we had recovered from the flurry of her departure we picked up the field glasses to follow her progress. We saw her swoop away from her first perch and disappear among the trees.

‘She isn’t the kind who comes home,’ I said to Freddy, almost in tears. (Cockatoos and some parrots usually return to the place where they were brought up, though lorries, it appears, seldom do.) ‘What will happen to her? She’s old and lame and domesticated. She’ll never be able to look after herself.’ Freddy tried most unconvincingly (being himself unconvinced) to persuade me that the Duchess would be all right, and I tried to keep from looking at her empty perch with the tin cup full of food on one side.

Two days afterwards, in the late afternoon, we saw some natives investigating a commotion in the grass near the house, and there was the Duchess, her wings exhausted, trying pathetically to flounder her way home on foot. After this wild spree she was so hungry, so penitent, and so relieved that she never left the house at all again. Her tastes were terrestrial, and she preferred limping about on the floor to any more elevated position. Her conversation was distinctly limited, consisting of occasional loud squawks, not pleasant to the ear, and the muttered word ‘Harrok,’ which must have been a favourite with her species, for the natives call it by that name.

To make up for the taciturnity of the Duchess we had Yacob, a brilliantly coloured lory from the island of Biak. On the mainland of New Guinea there are lorries almost identical with Yacob, but, like our cousin the gorilla, they have not the gift of speech, whereas Yacob spoke two languages with extreme fluency and almost without cessation. Besides this talent, he had the most beguiling ways. He

used to play in my lap like a kitten, rolling onto his back with both feet sticking in the air, clutching at my finger when I tickled him. Then, taking up a position on my knee, he would make darting attacks at the palm of my hand as I tried to close it over his head. Each time he eluded me he would give a flute-like giggle or guffaw with a tremendous belly laugh.

Once in a while our games became rather rough. Yacob would suddenly lose his precarious temper, peck accurately at me, and then burst into a torrent of ill-bred invective, hopping angrily to and fro as he scolded. My cue, not difficult to follow since he often drew blood, was to scold angrily back at him. He was not a good listener, and would only pitch his voice a little higher and insult me more rudely until I picked him up in disgust and dumped him on the table. There he would sit and reflect for a few moments.

‘After all,’ he would seem to say to himself, ‘perhaps I have been a little brusque with her. She feeds me and plays with me and sometimes takes me for walks. I’ll show her that all is forgiven.’

He would fly back onto my shoulder, rub his head affectionately against my neck, caress my cheek with his restless brush-like tongue, and wheedle me into good humour with honeyed tones and outrageous exhibitions of his charm.

Walks with Yacob were always stimulating. He rode on my shoulder or on a stick in my hand, taking the keenest interest in the passing scene and always full of conversation. Sometimes, with his melodious whistle, he would imitate the calls of other birds and scream with delight if one came near him.

So enchanted were we with Yacob that we were frantic when he fell ill. For days he refused to eat, to speak, or to swing on his perch. We tried to dose him with castor oil,

which enraged him, and to feed him forcibly with milk, which he regurgitated. One day when he seemed barely able to cling to his perch, we consulted Skolabé, one of our water boys, about his condition. Skolabé pondered awhile and then went out to fetch two bunches of leaves from the forest. One species he popped into his mouth and chewed. Then, taking up the unfortunate Yacob, he proceeded to spit a stream of green juice all over him. He repeated this process three or four times while I said to Freddy:

‘Poor Yacob! — This is the last straw. Shall we stop Skolabé and let him die in peace?’

Just as I made up my mind to interfere, Skolabé whisked Yacob briskly with the unchewed bunch of leaves and put him back on his perch. Yacob shook himself and settled down in deep depression. About an hour later, to our amazement, he began to whistle and tap a tattoo on his perch. We gave him a bit of papaya, which he ate voraciously, and from then on he was completely recovered.

His trouble, according to Skolabé, had been caused by a mischievous spirit from the nearest coastal tribe who had taken possession of him and could only be evicted by the proper medicinal leaves.

Miss Wilburforce never caused us any trouble at all. When we first came to New Guinea I had had a Japen Island lory, a rather dull and affectionate bird named Walter. On a prahu trip back from Sorong, Walter’s perch parted one morning and he hurtled off into the jungle, never to be seen again. That evening we stopped at a large native village incongruously named MacBonn. The spelling may be incorrect, but that was its pronunciation. The inhabitants were disagreeable and impudent, the rain came down in sheets, the smells and dirt were disheartening, and altogether I, at any rate, was in a very bad humour. Martin

got us supper and then disappeared into the rain and the dark. A short time later he reappeared, glistening and wet, and stood in the doorway looking sheepish and embarrassed. Suddenly he giggled nervously, produced from behind his back and handed to me a bamboo perch on which sat a very small and dejected-looking bird — a consolation for Walter. I made grateful noises and grimaces, but as soon as Martin had withdrawn I surveyed my new gift with distaste. It was nearly naked, and what remained to it in the way of feathers were dirty and dishevelled beyond belief. When I reached a tentative hand towards it, it let out a guttural snarl and darted venomously at me.

‘As though MacBonn weren’t dismal enough already,’ I wailed to Freddy. ‘Imagine carting this little horror all the way to Sainke Doek!’

We had maligned Miss Wilburforce. It subsequently transpired that she had been at that time uncontrollably moulting, for in the near future she became a dazzling little creature of brilliant blue and green with long stiff tail feathers which she flitted so proudly, and with so pompous a gait as she strutted about that it was obvious we had mistaken her sex. Her lack of cordiality must have been due to the fact that she (as we continued to refer to him) had been badly treated in the cheerless village of MacBonn, for after we had wooed her assiduously for a while and she had overcome her fright she grew very friendly in a coy, self-conscious way.

Miss Wilburforce’s favourite relaxation was the promenade. Whenever we talked to her or made admiring sounds she began to walk gravely from one end of her perch to the other, lifting her tiny legs and setting them down again with incomparable dignity and precision, chest well puffed out and head held high. Her volte-face turns at the end of the

perch were executed with amazing nimbleness, and were accompanied by a flip to her tail feathers that always reminded me of the gesture of a faultlessly tailored musician about to sit on a piano-stool.

Poor Miss Wilburforce! She was such a dandy that I think her unfortunate accident wounded her even more deeply in her vanity than her head. One night we were awakened by a terrific commotion from the birds. We ran out onto the veranda in time to see a dark silhouette drop from Miss Wilburforce's perch. When we got a lamp lit we saw that she had a very large hole in the top of her head. A rat must somehow have tight-roped along the string to her perch and tried to eat her alive. We anointed her with balm, but for some time we were afraid that for the rest of her life she would remain completely bald. It was an intense relief to everyone concerned when finally the first little new quills began to sprout in her crest.

Although the Papuans seem to feel the greatest distaste for their dogs, which they never feed and use as targets for any handy missile, they are extremely fond of birds. It is no small amount of trouble to climb to the leafy top of some tall pillar of the rain forest, arrange a slipnoose trap of twine baited with some bright-coloured fruit, and then wait below, motionless, for the feathered quarry to alight. Sometimes they shinny up a massive trunk to the hole which wary parent parrots had considered an impregnable fortress for their young. However they acquire their cockatoos, their parrots, or their lorries, they become greatly attached to them.

The Papuan ties a piece of twine around his pet bird's foot and attaches it to a stick. Wherever he travels the bird goes also. The women stuff the ends of their bird sticks into their carrying baskets, and you can often see one heading

for the sago swamp, three or four bright spots of colour bobbing along on her back. When she returns to the house, these sticks are wedged into the roof or wall, making a convenient movable perch. The women spend hours playing with their birds, talking to them and chewing up bits of baked green banana or sago to thrust into their beaks. In return for these attentions, a good-natured bird, when placed on its owner's head, will scrupulously eat up all the nits.

The natives are nice, too, to pigs, though that involves a less disinterested angle. After all, a pig grows eventually into more than a sociable companion. There is no domesticated line of pigs. Each pet piglet is a separate catch, sired by wild boar out of jungle sow. For this reason they are not particularly friendly animals. Men are justly afraid of them and hand them over to their wives or daughters to be reared. The women and the pigs seem to understand one another and become mutually very devoted. The pig trots along at his mistress's heels and whenever she calls him by name, comes charging to her. The uncle of Termit, one of the *débutante* belles of the village, sold Termit's pig to our Martin. Termit delivered the pig with tears streaming down her face. No sooner had she stumbled blindly off than shrill and piercing squeals started from the back steps where the pig was tethered. When this had kept up continuously for a considerable period, Martin's better nature finally triumphed. He loosed his recent acquisition, which shot like a small thunderbolt from the side of the house and disappeared, a streak through the mud, in search of its mistress.

Instead of whistling to a pig to follow you, you grunt. Freddy and I spent many diverting moments watching a man trying to lure his wife's pig to the sago swamp. Grunt-

ing enticingly, he would advance a few steps. The pig, making resigned noises, would follow a little way, then grunt protestingly and wheel around towards home. A scolding grunt from the man would stop him and a cajoling one almost persuade him to follow again. I never before realized the depth and scope of the language of the pig.

One day I was calling on some Madik ladies in their out-of-town house, a low little kennel-like shelter in a corn and tobacco garden. The husband of one of them had the week before speared a sow in the bush and captured a minute suckling pig to be brought up in the family. It was only about six bristly inches long, longitudinally striped black and yellow, and was obviously in much need of nourishment. The women of Sainke Doek do not, as is reported of other Papuans, nurse baby pigs, and they were half-heartedly attempting to make the starved little creature chew bits of sugar-cane, which it persistently refused.

'He's too young to be away from his mother,' I said helpfully.

'Yes, he will die, perhaps tonight,' they replied with typical Papuan resignation.

'I will take him home, if you like, and try to feed him on canned milk,' I suggested, and after a desultory conference, this was agreed upon.

The whole afternoon Freddy and I devoted to every conceivable method of persuading a pig to drink. The natives all sat around shaking their heads and saying, 'He will die.' By sunset, however, we believed that a sufficient amount of milk had dribbled down its protesting throat to keep our charge alive until the next day. Hopefully we bedded it down for the night in an old sweater.

But the Papuan seers were right. Perhaps the little pig had absorbed some of their defeatist attitude. Freddy vol-

unteered to perform a secret burial, and to the questions of the curious we only replied that the pig had died and we had thrown it away. Our precautions were, however, vain. The following afternoon three grinning little boys appeared on our veranda, rubbing their stomachs contentedly.

‘We found where the Tuan buried the pig. We have just eaten him. He was delicious.’

‘After all,’ I thought disgustedly, ‘some day, if the government isn’t careful, somebody will probably eat *them*.’

\* \* \* \*

Rebo was, as even Freddy grudgingly admitted, the life of the party. She was very small and black and furry, looking much like a miniature bear except for the long tail, white-tipped, which trailed out behind her, and the blankly benign expression in her rather prominent eyes. Being a lady tree-kangaroo, she possessed a pocket, a very small edition of the one from which she had so recently emerged. Her benignity, Freddy would tell you, was entirely confined to her eyes.

For so small and helpless an animal she was ridiculously ferocious, and regarded me as her only friend in a world of two-legged and quadrupedal enemies. This was both flattering and inconvenient, for as she grew larger, her gait, an alternation of hop and gallop, never grew appreciably faster. She insisted on following me wherever I went, which meant that I had to adapt my pace to hers. When we travelled down to Sorong and back to replenish our supplies it was obviously impossible to regulate the speed of ourselves and our carriers to Rebo’s whims, and so I had to carry her. At the end of a long day of staggering over hidden roots, divesting myself of festoons of lianas and coils of scratchy vines, wading through crocodile-infested rivers with slippery bot-



toms, ploughing up steep bare slopes open to the sun, Rebo became inordinately heavy and extremely restless. She would clamber up and down me, trying now to perch on the top of my head, claws well dug in for security, now shinnying down my leg to the ground. No native would approach within her foraying range, and Freddy, whom I ordinarily consider a courageous individual, limited his co-operation to caustic comments on the inadvisability of making wild animals into pets.

At home in Sainke Doek, Rebo's charms were more apparent. She made the most of the arboreal aspects of our house, hitching up the supporting posts, running across the rafters, nibbling off the orchids, rearranging the odd bits of gabba-gabba<sup>1</sup> laid here and there as suggestions of ceiling, and not infrequently precipitating one down on our heads. During the heat of the day she mercifully took a long siesta, generally in the upper-berth hammock formed by the top of my mosquito net. Unfortunately this meant that she often didn't care to sleep through the night. She would pick some dark hour at random and set about the business of knocking down our clothes hung from a few cherished coat-hangers against the wall. Then, having overturned the canteen of water on the table, she would begin investigating Freddy's shotgun shells under his pajamas on the shelf. Those that didn't please her were briskly shoved off and clattered on and through the floor. A period of gymnastics would follow on the rope from which our mosquito nets were hung. This, by some complicated system of weights and measures, stresses and strains, always caused our air mattresses, under which the nets were tucked, to bounce unrestfully. Finally Rebo would hop onto the sagging top of my net, swing like a sailor over the side, descend

<sup>1</sup> Palm-leaf stalk.

by means of poking her claws through its delicate tissues, and land with a thump on the edge of my pillow. Bored by this time with her own devices and anxious for companionship through the cold grey dawn, she would set herself to pulling my hair until the last obstinate vestiges of sleep had been dispelled.

Feeding Rebo was a simple problem, for close to our house was a private little swamp where the long green kankung vines that she loved grew in profusion. I used to roll up my shorts and wade in through the mosquito wrigglers to pull them up while Rebo leapt onto a floating log and gazed in distress at her wet tail drifting out behind her. Rarely was this slight effort necessary, however. To Rebo, as to a shrine, food offerings were brought by the natives almost every day. In the house the kankung was piled on the veranda floor and Rebo sat on her hind legs beside it, pulling out a vine at a time with one hand and munching it thoughtfully. As beverages she favoured tea and beer. Every afternoon she had a saucer of tea and milk with us, covering her black muzzle with white froth, and, if you had asked, would probably have admitted to missing beer at Sainke Doek as much as we did.

Rebo's intelligence quotient was not, I'm afraid, very high. Marsupials are not, after all, among the more advanced types of mammals. For this reason I was all the more proud that she always came when I called her, emerging covered with cobwebs from the dark recesses of the roof or leaping through the window from the godown table where she liked to play with bandages and bottles, scattering our supplies as she jumped. But most of the time she spent close beside me. If I lay back in a canvas chair she sat on the edge of it, paws on my knee. If I sat in a straight chair, writing or typing, she balanced on the back of it, paws on

my shoulder or around my neck. She also liked to do this at meal times, but took such an interest in what I ate, snatching rudely from her advantageous position, that we often tiptoed to lunch and spoke in whispers, hoping against hope that Rebo would sleep through the meal.

It was at our supper that she had the most fun. She always wakened from her siesta in the late afternoon and spent a busy hour with our hanging orchid plants and plants we had thought were orchids but turned out not to be. Then followed the excitement of a trip to the bath-house with me just as darkness began to fall. Rebo loved the night, and her black fur was a perfect camouflage for our ill-lit veranda. When we sat down to our soup Rebo was never to be found. Not until Martin stepped softly around the table to pick up the dishes did she give evidence of her whereabouts. From her hiding place under the table or my chair she would suddenly spring at his bare foot, grasp it tightly for a second, and then dart away again into the shadows. Poor Martin, deeply conscious of the dignity of his position, suffered terribly from this ordeal. A lightning jump, a muffled screech, and he would continue on his way, trying to look as though nothing had happened. I would reprimand Rebo severely but, invariably misinterpreting my remarks as an invitation to join us, she would hitch up the back of my chair and reach over my shoulder for a piece of bread and jam.

If we were starting on a long trip, we slunk surreptitiously out of the house while Rebo napped. When she awoke and found us gone she became frantic, hopping wildly all over the house in search of me, chittering as she went to frighten off any ambush. Sometimes she even left the house and started down the path, anxiously peering around. Martin or Evart, far too terrified to touch her, would stand guard

at a safe distance to keep off stray dogs until we returned.

Ordinarily she looked on life as a very solemn affair, but once in so often she succumbed to an attack of playfulness like a puppy's running fits — leaping on me suddenly, then dashing away, circling around and pouncing again. In fact, in spite of her limited intellect, I am convinced that her relations with Sanky and Freddy showed that she had a sense of humour. If Rebo and Sanky carried on a guerrilla warfare with one another, she and Freddy made use of Blitzkrieg tactics. Although they both pretended an active dislike for each other, I suspect they derived a great deal of enjoyment from their campaigns. Freddy, if he remembered, never sat near the veranda railing, but sometimes he was absent-minded. Rebo never failed to notice this slip. She would creep silently along the rail towards him. Whenever he moved or turned the page of his book, she sat up and looked off into the distance, pretending to admire the view. Once he was absorbed again she crept a little closer until she reached the spot nearest to the back of his chair. With her tail stretching out over the rail as counter-balance she would lean forward ready to spring, her little hands twitching to clutch Freddy's hair. Some sixth sense generally warned Freddy at this moment. He would glance over his shoulder, give a wild yell, and leap out of his chair. Rebo, overbalanced, would jump onto the chair, rush a few feet after Freddy, and then dart to me for protection, chittering and switching her tail. Freddy would bellow the familiar phrase:

'That damn animal! Can't I ever have any peace?' But I could see the corners of his lips twitching.

Sometimes there would be shouts and poundings from the bedroom. Rebo, through sheer spite, generally chose to nap on one of Freddy's shelves rather than on mine. When-

ever Freddy wanted anything from them she would be curled aggressively on top of it. If he attempted to reach it she chittered and batted at him with her paw. Freddy would bang on the shelves to frighten her off and then chase after her, stamping noisily for self-protection. In fact, Freddy and Rebo chased each other frequently while I looked on like a nervous governess, ready to interfere if the children got too rough. When Rebo bounced over to me, climbed on my shoulder, and put her paws around my neck, I found it easier to be stern with Freddy than with her.

There was one cat in Sainke Doek. How it got there no one ever knew, and the natives treated it with the utmost respect. What it subsisted on was also a mystery, for it was irritatingly blasé about the rats. It came over once a day for a romp with Rebo. Their methods of play were so extremely unlike that they both became bewildered if they ever got beyond the stage of chasing each other around, for Rebo's next move was to grapple with her playmate as though she were the trunk of a slender tree. In spite of a few minor injuries inflicted on each side, they remained admiring friends. Sometimes when I strolled away from the house I would be warned by muffled giggles to look over my shoulder and would find myself the leader of a strange little expedition. Rebo would be following close behind, intent on the problem of progression. On Rebo's heels would be the cat, studying with interest her eccentric gait. Behind the cat stalked the young cassowary, who would follow any moving object.

Our bath-house was a short distance from the main house — a little palm-leaf construction filled with kerosene tins of water from the stream. It was usually impossible to take a bath alone. The door would only close halfway, offering an

enticing invitation to Rebo, the cat, and the cassowary. Besides them, three hens, each with a brood of six or seven chicks, found the wet floor of the bathroom an ideal place to roost, and clucked angrily at us if we splashed.

We never did anything to discourage chickens, for once a noisy old hen, accompanied by a suspiciously interested rooster, laid an egg two days in succession on one of the shelves in our bedroom. These were the only eggs we ever had in Sainke Doek that didn't come from a cassowary, but in spite of our efforts to attract our neighbour's poultry, it never happened again.

# Seven

## Skolabé

IT MAY SOUND sentimental to say that we regarded many of these primitive cannibals with a great deal of affection. Such, however, was the case. There were few whom we did not like, many of whom we were very fond and from whom we parted with sorrow.

Our greatest delight was Skolabé, who, since he lived in our house, was practically a member of the family. His official position was that of one of our 'water boys.' First we had had Slomsli and Nandin. Slomsli had the most neatly braided pigtails in Sainke Doek and was reserved and dignified. He worked hard, tracked pig well, and looked very nice, but was, on the whole, rather solemn and uninteresting. Nandin was a stupid, brutish-looking creature whose only distinction lay in the very large cassowary quill he wore through his nose. After two months both Nandin and Slomsli fell simultaneously in love. Nandin gave away to the indifferent object of his affections his cassowary quill and thereby lost his last vestige of personality. Slomsli had success and honourable intentions, so he left us to travel from place to place to collect the pieces of cloth demanded as the price for his bride. It was then that our days were brightened by the acquisition of Skolabé.

Skolabé looked more like a chimpanzee than most Papuans. His hair was arranged in a bunch of tufts tied together at random and at any old angle, and underneath

these his exaggerated features registered vehemently every passing emotion. In moments of worry or deep concentration his brow puckered pitifully; he expressed amazement and surprise, like the animal he so closely resembled, by protruding his enormous lips several inches from his face. He was a deft and silent tracker and a conscientious worker, but above all he possessed a great gift for entertainment. It used to make us laugh just to look at him as he strutted around the corner from the kitchen. Martin was as attached to Skolabé as we were, and the three of us used to vie for his company. Engaging him in conversation was not difficult, for he talked incessantly on any subject that entered his mind, from frivolous bits of scandal to earnest expositions of Madik law and custom and biting comments on our neighbours. Always we waited anxiously for Skolabé to tell us something that amused him, for his sense of humour embraced the entire gamut of human experience. Whenever he embarked on something that he considered funny, his entire body dissolved helplessly into laughter so contagious that Freddy and I would rock to and fro with sympathetic tears streaming down our cheeks, reverting to the breathless convulsions that usually end with childhood. Even Martin, a thin pillar of gloom in the kitchen, giggled all day long if Skolabé were there.

Skolabé was very particular about our other friends, seeming to feel personally responsible for our consorting only with the right people. Most of the Madik took the rest as they came, maintaining an attitude of calm tolerance and tribal solidarity mixed with moments of temporary vexation. Not so Skolabé. His attitude on everything and everyone was passionately unequivocal. Young though he was, he was extremely conservative about custom and convention, and anyone not behaving quite up to scratch in-



curred his bitter censure. For some reason of his own he disapproved of Saké, the chief, whom for political as well as anthropological expediency we had assiduously cultivated. Whenever Saké came to see us, which was frequently, Skolabé grimaced, rose from the floor, and stalked sourly to the kitchen. This open disrespect to the village headmen seemed to us tactless, but Sainke Doek was no totalitarian state, and Saké paid little attention to Skolabé's defection. Perhaps because he was half-Moraid and the only member of the Cassowary clan in Sainke Doek, Skolabé felt independent of anyone else's authority.

Fortunately Skolabé approved of Sejak, for he was always with us. They were united by the same conservative tastes and sense of decorum. Only in Skolabé's company did Sejak put aside his impenetrable solemnity and laugh as much as the rest of us.

One day Skolabé came to me and asked if he might borrow my scissors; Sejak had agreed to give him a haircut. The operation was conducted, to an accompaniment of muffled giggles on our veranda. Once the proper effect had been produced to the satisfaction of everybody, Skolabé carefully amassed the pile of springy trimmings scattered over the floor. I presumed that he was being tidy.

'What are you going to do with those, Skolabé, burn them?' I asked casually.

An expression of horror crossed his face.

'Burn them!' he said in consternation. 'If I put my hair in the fire I should die. I am going to take it and hide it high up in a tree so no one can find it.'

'Oh,' I said, 'but why must you be so careful? If you don't burn it, who else would?'

'I don't know,' said Skolabé, his face darkening, 'but someone might.'

‘Here, among our own people, it is not so dangerous,’ said Sejak, ‘but in strange places we don’t know whom we can trust.’

‘But,’ I objected, ‘there would be no need to cut your hair in a strange place.’

‘There are many other things which an enemy can use to harm you,’ said Sejak. ‘A piece of your breech-clout, the skin of a banana you have eaten, the sugar-cane which you have chewed and spat out. Or your footprints. If a man plants “Mnot” in your footprints, you will be sick. But the most dangerous is the end of a cigarette you have smoked.’

‘Yes,’ said Skolabé. ‘Tobacco is the most dangerous.’

‘What must you do with these things?’ I asked.

‘Burn them, so that nothing is left,’ said Sejak.

‘Oh,’ I said, ‘but your hair?’

‘Fire,’ Sejak answered, ‘is only dangerous to hair. For everything else it is water.’

‘Yes, or an anthill,’ Skolabé interpolated.

Sejak nodded. ‘Anthills, too. If anyone throws your cigarette into water or puts it onto an anthill, you will die. With food it is not so bad. It will only make you sick.’

‘Water,’ said Skolabé, spitting through a hole in the floor, ‘is even dangerous to water. If you empty your bamboo water-container into a stream you might be sick too.’

‘But tobacco,’ said Sejak, ‘is the worst. If a man steals tobacco leaves from my garden, I throw leaves from the same plant in water and he dies.’

‘Goodness!’ I said. ‘There seem to be a lot of ways of causing people trouble.’

‘Yes,’ said Sejak, ‘these things are dangerous if your enemy does them. But if someone steals my bananas I cut two sharp sticks and run them through the tree-trunk and

it makes the man ill. Then, if he wants to get well, he must soften my heart with Mle.'

'Did you ever do that to anyone?' I asked.

Sejak ignored the question. 'You know old Satukwa, Leti's father?' he asked in turn.

I shook my head.

'He was a bad man inside, very lazy. He never planted his own garden; he only stole from other people's. He was one of our own people, but everyone became angry with him. Three times he stole the taro from Ulas's garden. Then Ulas made a little sago-mallet — only so long' (Sejak demonstrated a four-inch length) — 'and he beat the holes where the taro had been with it. He said: "O Naté, O Nakwo,<sup>1</sup> you see this sago-mallet, you see somebody stole my taro. Eat him up until he is dead." So Satukwa got the "dekelit" disease.'

'Yes,' said Skolabé delightedly, 'his nose fell off and he became covered with sores and went to live in the jungle alone. The other day I saw him. He was like a bush pig. He was naked and he hid behind the bushes.'

'His nose fell off right away,' gurgled Sejak. 'If you pound a plant with a little sago-mallet, a nose always falls off.'

Skolabé and Sejak could contain themselves no longer. Shrieking with laughter they rolled on the floor.

'What on earth is all this about?' asked Freddy, coming out onto the veranda.

'It's about a man whose nose fell off,' I explained, and then began laughing helplessly myself.

Skolabé, like Sejak, had one very un-Papuan trait; he gloried in a sense of responsibility. Once when Freddy had to go to Sorong, leaving me in Sainke Doek, he said solemnly to Skolabé:

<sup>1</sup> Naté and Nakwo are the two kinds of ghosts.

'I have to go away for some days, but I know, Skolabé, that the Nunya will be safe with you to protect her.'

Deeply impressed, Skolabé said in sepulchral tones:

'Yes, Tuan, I will guard the Nunya.'

Several times every day he referred to the onerous task that had been thrust upon him, sometimes with pride and pleasure, sometimes the reverse.

'You see those men going by, Nunya?' he said one day. 'They are all going to Sejut. I have a San in Sejut and I should like to go too. But,' tragically, 'I have to stay here and look after you. I alone must remain in the village.'

'Go along, why don't you, Skolabé?' I said. 'I'll be all right. After all, Martin and Evart are here.'

'I cannot,' he said with dignity. 'It was I the Tuan told to take care of you.'

All that day he went about looking like a spaniel that had been chained up in a deserted house. The next morning when he strutted onto the veranda I was relieved to see that he looked more cheerful.

Suddenly he stopped dead and stared at me. 'What a beautiful shirt you have on, Nunya,' he said. 'What a beautiful shirt!'

I was attired in a black-and-white seersucker blouse that Evart's ministrations had reduced to a very strange shape indeed.

'So glad you like it, Skolabé,' I said airily, but the subject, it seemed, was by no means dismissed. It was some time before Skolabé screwed up his courage to the necessary point.

'Do you think, Nunya,' he said presently, 'that the Tuan would mind if you gave me that shirt?'

'I don't believe that *he* would, but *I* should,' I said firmly. 'I need this shirt myself.'

Skolabé, who had never asked or even hinted for anything from us before, was very crestfallen at my reply. He behaved so virtuously and meekly for the rest of the day that I naturally relented. Besides, I was frankly tired of the black and white checks.

‘All right, Skolabé, you can have it,’ I said the next morning, and handed over the garment to him.

Skolabé looked incredulous of his luck. ‘I will give it to my girl when I go back to the mountains,’ he said gravely, and then, walking gradually faster and faster, disappeared towards the village. Eventually perhaps the blouse did reach the lady of his choice, but it had in the meantime a busy career. Whenever he wanted to ingratiate himself with anyone, man or woman, or pay back a favour, Skolabé lent it out for a brief period. But most of all he wore it himself, stepping in it as proudly as a peacock, the tails of his red breech-clout swinging below its brief length.

Nor was he unmindful of my generosity. One day he appeared with a pandanus-leaf package and presented it wordlessly to me.

I opened it up and found inside a very grubby and decayed bunch of feathers bound together into a head ornament.

‘Isn’t that beautiful, Nunya?’ asked Skolabé proudly. ‘That is in return for my shirt.’

# Eight

## Sejak the witch killer

SEJAK was an earnest, stocky little man and a secretive one. His face, like his body, was as broad as it was long, and for some reason this gave him an only half-justified look of incorruptible honesty. His sense of humour was heavy and inclined to be morbid. Though the thought of the noseless Satukwa or the fingers dropping off a leprous friend convulsed him, less bloodthirsty topics left him serious and unmoved.

With this trait went another in a not infrequent combination: Sejak was sentimental. A sentimental human being is not a rare phenomenon, but a sentimental Papuan is. When he referred to his garden at home, his education in the bush or his mother, who had been eaten a few years before, one felt one should avert one's eyes from the spectacle of so much proper feeling. Sejak was extremely conventional, a stickler for etiquette and a perfectionist in details, whether they related to burying his grandfather or appliquéing the design on an armband. Consequently his conversation, though it lacked verve, was realistic and reliable, and he was invaluable as a demonstrator of arts and crafts, for his square black hands were never idle. Wherever he went he carried with him a half-finished fishnet which he strung up on the nearest post, or the grasses with which he was weaving a bandolier, or strands of bark fibre from which he spun a string.

As though he had not enough of these busy little duties to absorb him, he firmly and without any consultation shouldered us as his personal responsibility, seeming to feel himself indispensable to our welfare and to the propriety of our behaviour. He made us feel as though time had run backwards to nursery days presided over by a stern and humourless governess. Freddy managed to behave like a normal adult in spite of it, but I have always been intimidated by anyone who sets himself in authority over me, and resorted to the most childlike manoeuvres of creeping out the back door or pretending to go and take a bath whenever I wanted to do anything that might have met with his disapproval. Besides this meticulous supervision there was something about his perpetual industry, his rectitude and sobriety, that was dampening to our spirits. It was, therefore, a great shock when we discovered that this paragon of the most depressing virtues was susceptible to bribery.

A day came when Sainke Doek quietly and unobtrusively emptied itself. Every man, woman, and child had set out, as though an Exodus had been proclaimed, in the pursuit of his or her own business, food, or temporary ideal of happiness. Only Sejak, loyal to his self-imposed duty towards his charges, remained behind, full of more than usual importance at the greatness of his sacrifice and the weight of his solitary responsibility. He slept at his own house, but all his waking hours were spent on our veranda with some sort of handiwork, a living monument of reproach to dreams of idle relaxation.

There was one element in Madik life about which we had elicited nothing but blank looks and masterpieces of evasion. This was the Initiation House to which they sent their young men — a sort of preparatory school where they were taught bush-lore, magic, and medicine. For some reason

the Madik were nervous of mentioning this to us, and we had never pressed the matter for fear of frightening or offending them irreparably. Now we had Sejak completely to ourselves with no one else to bolster up his morale. The fact that he remained with us seemed to indicate the crowning blossom of a trustful friendship, and altogether the situation appeared propitious for tackling the subject of Madik education. Freddy was out chasing pig; there was an ample supply of cheap cigarettes, christened 'Lizard' by the Chinese traders; the stage seemed set for the most confidential of chats. I approached the subject by a circuitous route; it must have taken an hour of carefully directed conversation before I brought it up as casually as possible.

Sejak looked at me out of the corners of his eyes and then pressed his lips together tightly. After a pause he said:

'I don't know what you're talking about. Tomorrow, if you like, we will go to the sago swamp again. Perhaps you don't understand yet all about making sago.'

'Did you ever go to one of these "schools," Sejak?' I asked blandly.

Sejak shifted uneasily. 'Do you hear that bird?' he said. 'That is what we call the "ndamshul." It is good to eat.'

'Can the boys during that period eat whatever they please, or are certain foods tabu?' I quickly interposed.

Sejak began to develop a hunted look. He ransacked his little pandanus handbag and produced a red leaf.

'This is what I was telling you about the other day. We soak it in water and it makes a dye for our armbands.'

Saké would have drawn a red herring across the trail and adroitly led me in the wrong direction, or invented some cock-and-bull story on the spur of the moment that would explain any rumours I had heard about the initiations. But Sejak was not a subtle man.



'Now, Sejak,' I said ingratiatingly, 'you know that we mean no harm to your people. We have told you about the customs in our country. Why won't you tell me about yours?'

By this time Sejak was resting his chin on his breastbone like a sulky and tormented child.

'I don't know what you're talking about,' he reiterated desperately.

Neither the roundabout nor the brutally direct approach seemed to be a success.

'If I let him get away with this,' I thought, rather desperate myself, 'the subject will be tabu forever and I'll always be an object of suspicion.'

I realized with chagrin that I had neglected the most important rule of Papuan intercourse: if you want to get something out of someone, first you must make him laugh. And as they would almost rather laugh than eat, it should never be difficult.

'I see now you are joking with me, Sejak,' I said with an attempt at a simper. 'Each time I ask a question about schools, you pretend not to understand and talk about something else. It's very clever and funny of you.'

Slapping my thigh wasn't *de rigueur*, I hoped, but I took a deep breath and let it out in a laugh.

Sejak dared to look up again and laughed too, though a trifle nervously.

'I will tell you about a new way of catching fish,' he said with regained equanimity.

'I'm not interested in fish. I want to know about the "schools"!'

Sejak began to giggle. 'You pour poison in the water ...' he gasped, and then gave way to a fit of uncontrollable guffaws.

For the next hour we entertained ourselves very much with this conversational duel. Sejak had never played a game that he enjoyed more. I was pleased that we were once again on a friendly footing; that the look of anxious suspicion had left his eyes. But we were not making noticeable progress and a further change of tactics seemed to be indicated.

'I think we have something from our country that you haven't yet seen,' I said, and walked over to the room where we kept our trade goods.

Sejak looked as disappointed as if I had upset the chess-board in the middle of a tournament game. After a short search among our possessions I returned with a mirror in my hand.

'What do you think of this?' I asked him.

Sejak's expression underwent a startling revolution. He snatched the mirror with a complete lack of his usual stately courtesy and ecstatically contemplated his face.

'Oh, how beautiful, how beautiful!' he breathed.

'Would you like to have it?' I asked.

It is seldom in life that one person can dangle in front of another the keys to the Gates of Paradise. Sejak clutched the mirror to his chest and nodded mutely.

'Oh, not so fast, Sejak,' I said. 'You must give it back to me now. Tonight you try and remember something about those "schools." Then tomorrow morning, if you can recall anything, come to me and I will give you the mirror.'

The next morning when Freddy and I came out for our coffee, a hunched figure sat on the ground below. Sejak's face looked lined and his body limp. He must have wrestled with temptation the whole night through. The moment we put down our coffee cups he sprang to the top of the steps.

'Please,' he said, 'I want my mirror.'

As a generous gesture I immediately handed him the mirror without any quibbling. This confidence proved to be quite justifiable; Sejak had no idea of dodging his part of the bargain. He composed himself on his heels, gazed rapturously at his mirrored image and said:

'In the night I remembered.'

Once launched on them, the 'schools' or initiation houses turned out to be one of Sejak's favourite topics of conversation. For hours at a time and day after day he would recount with meticulous detail the proceedings of the 'Newun'. He attacked the subject with such thoroughness and persistence that it seemed as though the governess had at last got into her stride, and decided that we should be taught every last fact whether we liked it or not.

A Newun, it seems, takes place every four or five years. Some father decides that his son is ripe for education; surreptitiously he seeks out the fathers or uncles of other boys and together they make their plans. The first requisite of instruction is an instructor, and each clan (except the Yakwam, which, being descended from a woman, had no opportunity to inherit masculine prerogatives) has a trained 'Duunbam,' a man who has attended a number of different Newuns and knows in consequence all that they have to teach. Having obtained the services of one of these Duunbams the men all repair to a secret part of the forest and set about building a Newun House, taking all possible precautions that it shall not come to the ears of the projected pupils. The very word 'Newun' throws terror into little boys' souls, and if they had any inkling of what was in store for them they would certainly take to their heels and hide until the danger was past. As it is, each boy has to be captured by force and often struggles desperately to escape from the grim-faced men surrounding him.

'We catch the boys like pigs,' said Sejak, 'and carry them squealing to the Newun. Their mothers and sisters cry and lament as though the boys were dead when we take them away.'

Once safely deposited in the Newun house there are no further attempts at escape, for the penalty imposed on a renegade is death.

The clan affiliations and age of the prospective pupils are immaterial. Unlike most other institutions of its kind, the Newun has no relation to adolescence. Sometimes young married men are torn away from their wives to fill the quota. The exact significance of the Newun is, in fact, difficult to define. It is not, like its equivalent among most primitive peoples, a 'passage rite' spanning the cleavage between childhood and manhood. Nor is it a necessary initiation into tribal life, for a number of men never attend a Newun at all and are not considered in any way inferior to or different from those who have. Actually it is a sort of educational institution to provide for the tribe men skilled in the arts of healing and in etiquette and tradition.

It is, however, not a purely 'secular' institution. The pupils, during the period of their instruction, are undoubtedly considered to be in some vague supernatural danger and must, in this abnormal state, protect themselves by adhering to a number of tabus. Their diet is rigidly restricted; they may not bathe nor shave nor cut their hair, nor can they be called by their own names, but borrow one from some dog belonging to the family. When his education is completed each graduate receives a new name. This change of names occurs among the Madik for numerous reasons — a scapegoat to distract danger away from the individual, a disguise to baffle evil spirits or ghosts. Little Kam, for instance, had had three different names since he was born:

each time he fell ill he had been given a new one in the hope of outwitting the disease.

One of the strictest tabus is against seeing or being seen by a woman. Women the world over are barred from the pageant of man's make-believe, for how, in the presence of the hard-headed female realist, can he lose himself in his esoteric dreams? Besides, a secret, to have any meaning at all, must be kept from someone, and men love to impress the female with the superior knowledge of the male. The fact that Sejak was willing to talk with me about the Newun showed that in Madik eyes I was not considered a bona fide woman at all, but some strange neuter creature of another species about as far removed from ordinary mankind as a cassowary. I'm inclined to think that the seeds of miscegenation spring from the more civilized races and not from the strongly conservative and unimaginative tastes of primitive peoples.

The Madik wisely do not choose completely to alienate their womenfolk, for, after all, they have their practical uses. The Newun members clear and plant their own gardens, but they are largely dependent on the food supplied by their female relations. In an attempt to lure wives, mothers, and sisters to bring rolls of sago and taro and corn, they construct what they call the 'Women's Newun' within easy walking of the men's house, hoping that the women will leave food offerings at a designated spot in the No-Man's-Land between the two buildings.

Some of the Duunbam's teaching does not seem to merit the veil of secrecy drawn over it, for it has to do with the arts of tracking the cuscus to his lair, how to find the smallest marsupials in their nests, how to make pig and bird traps, what reeds and grasses to weave into armbands.

Another large part of the young men's training is thera-

peutic. They are taught the diagnosis and cure of the more prevalent diseases and how to find and use the infinite variety of 'medicinal' leaves, herbs, and vines, which to chew and spit, which to mix into muddy poultices. Good magic and bad magic are taught to them, the mystery of poisons, and the means of luring back a wandering soul. By the time they attend the dance which marks their début from the Newun in new clothes and ornaments, and under their new names, they have become helpful and desirable members of the tribe, ready to tend the sick and succour the obsessed. In all their training there is no severe discipline, no test of courage, no mutilation — simply an instructive paternal tutelage.

Doubtless in the tangled growth of the Rain Forest poisonous plants exist, but the most popular method of disposing of an enemy is by a magical plant known only to graduates of the Newun. 'Kwi' is the powdered bark of a tree; all that it requires to be fatal is to be placed on someone's head, preferably while he is sleeping. It has another property which would endear it to the writer of detective stories: it permits the 'poisoner' to establish a perfect alibi for the time of his victim's death. All he need do is murmur under his breath the moment when the Kwi is to take effect and then arrange to be innocently poking in his garden a respectable distance away at that time.

The force of this alibi is naturally rather diminished by the fact that every Madik knows the idiosyncrasies of Kwi, and also that every Madik is constitutionally averse to the verdict 'death from natural causes.' When a man dies the chances are ten to one that a human or supernatural being has killed him. The murderer is nevertheless protected to some extent. Although the finger of suspicion may point at him, it probably points at a number of others also — any-

one believed to have held any sort of grudge against the dead man. The laying-on of Kwi cannot be traced to him without subsequent thorough investigation.

Sejak told us about a case at which he had assisted. Nakari, his father's sister's husband's brother, had waked one morning feeling very unwell. Nakari's brother examined him closely and diagnostically. On Nakari's forehead he saw a small black spot.

'Oh, my brother, it is Kwi,' he cried, 'and the Kwi is on your forehead. You must surely die.'

Although they had little hope of saving Nakari, his relations rushed out and collected all sorts of medicines, with which they anointed him profusely while the brother scratched away at his forehead with a loop of rattan in a forlorn effort to draw out the fatal Kwi. As the day wore on Nakari turned greener and greener and began to bleed from his mouth and nose in a ghastly symphony of colour. By nightfall he was dead.

All the most remote appendages of the family tree were assembled, including Sejak, and the usual verdict was promptly reached of murder by a person or persons unknown.

A list was made of all the people who might feel inimically towards Nakari. There was Yakwo; he had been dunning Nakari for a piece of cloth due him for several generations, and Nakari had been too shiftless to do anything about it. And Dim; Nakari's son had had an affair with Dim's niece but neither father nor son had ever shown any signs of producing the cloth which would have made an honest woman of her. Then Nakari and Shubul had recently had words — no one knew exactly why. These three men were obviously the favourites, but several less likely candidates were added for the pleasure of prolonging the oratorical dis-

cussion, airing private grudges, and the assurance of having left no stone unturned.

The cast was now chosen; it remained to decide on the play. The Madik have ingeniously evolved two forms of murder trial, both of which simultaneously reveal and execute the murderer—a vast improvement over the cumbersome paraphernalia of our criminal law. The choice between the two trials depends on the condition of the corpus delicti. Nothing ever happens in a hurry in New Guinea; to decide on a course of action, notify the proper people, and to gather a suitable group in a suitable place at a suitable time is not the affair of a Papuan moment. It sometimes happens that by the time the stage is set the murdered man has been some time dead, and only his clean white bones remain.

Under these conditions, and with such a reliable representative of the deceased available, the ensuing proceedings take place by the rack whereon his relics repose. While the guests wait uneasily at one side, the family build a fire. Over the coals they place big flat leaves and on them arrange a layer of the murdered man's bones garnished with raw sago and green bananas. Once properly roasted, this macabre goulash is passed around to each of the unenthusiastic suspects. As they start to eat, the ghosts of the vicinity are called upon to see that the bones, having penetrated to the stomach of the murderer, dispatch him on the spot. And so, according to all accounts, they infallibly do. In the meantime the pure in heart, undeterred by the unusual ingredients, are one more meal to the good, sufficient recompense for any trouble to which they may have been put.

There was no dining off bones in the case of Sejak's father's sister's husband's brother. Sejak was about as un-



procrastinating as a Madik could be, and he was eager to clear matters up as soon as possible.

‘We will have the “Undashulko” — the trial of the knife in the bamboo,’ he said. ‘Blit and I will go to tap the saguer tree and you and you — go gather rattan to make the “Guns.”’

A Gun is a strip of rattan which serves as the Papuan calendar, and by which meetings and future events are arranged. A knot is made for every day before the specified date. The recipient cuts off one knot each morning. When there is no knot left to cut, he realizes the set day has dawned. For a large gathering they are sent out in all directions, carefully tallied with the mother Gun which the expectant host keeps at home for his own information.

Yakwo, Dim, Shubul, and the other suspects received their rattan invitations for the Undashulko. Such an invitation cannot very well be refused; failure to put in an appearance would be construed as an admission of guilt. The chance of supernaturally invoked punishment would immediately be replaced by a very certain volley of spears hurled by human hands.

Sejak’s eyes always began to dance with excitement when he recounted the Undashulko. All the guests had arrived promptly and sat in a circle on the floor of Nakari’s brother’s house. In the corner stood an enormous bamboo node brimming with the liquid and mildly intoxicating results of Sejak’s labours on the saguer tree. Grouped around it were several cane saguer drinking tubes, incised with crisscross lines and gaily stained with red. Sejak was convinced — or so he said afterwards — that it was Dim who had killed Nakari.

‘If someone’s son had an affair with my niece and never paid me for it I think I would kill him,’ he explained with gentle logic. ‘Or the son,’ he added reflectively.

'So,' he said, 'I filled one of the cane tubes with saguer, and in it I placed a new sharp knife I had bought from a Moi man. Then I called in a very loud voice to the ghost of Nakari. I told him: "The man who killed you with Kwi is here somewhere. When he drinks the saguer from this tube, do you, with your ghostly hand, plunge the knife into his insides and kill him." Then I gave the tube to Dim to drink. Dim's eyes were rolling like this' (it was almost impossible for Sejak's eyes to roll any more in demonstration) 'and his hands were shaking like leaves in the wind, but he tipped up the tube and drank the saguer while we all waited and watched. Suddenly,' shouted Sejak, throwing his comb on the floor with a clatter, 'he dropped the tube like this and doubled up like this and he vomited blood, pools and pools of blood, from where the knife had cut his insides. And then he died.' Sejak slapped his thighs and rocked back and forth in retrospective enjoyment. 'Nakari's ghost had killed him; he knew his murderer. You can't fool a ghost.'

'That must have been very satisfactory,' we said, impressed. 'What happened then? Was Dim's family annoyed?'

'Oh, no,' said Sejak. 'How could they be? Dim had killed Nakari and it was justice.'

We mulled over this for a while until we heard Sejak give vent to several heavy sighs. We looked at him in surprise.

'Were you, after all, sorry to see Dim die?'

'Oh, no,' he said again. 'But I was remembering that then we left the house with the big bamboo full of saguer and we drank it all up. It had little red peppers in it. It was the best I ever tasted.'

\* \* \* \*

Sejak was a patriotic and important member of his tribe. In the present degenerate days there are few men as well

educated as he, for Sejak had not been satisfied with the preliminary general instruction received at the Newun. With a few others he had pursued a postgraduate course under the tutelage of the wise old teacher of the young men's house. This advanced curriculum had one rather peculiar characteristic. The pupils were instructed in the art of curing a number of complicated diseases which could only be contracted by those who had learned these cures. It would really seem that these ambitious students made very little actual forward progress save in the business of indefinitely checkmating themselves. Why learn to cure small-pox, for instance, if you were immune to it until you knew the cure?

There was one compensation for this mass of ambivalent information. It was only a postgraduate who knew how to kill a witch.

Sejak was modest about his accomplishments. It was not from him but from some of his admirers that we were first told the tale of how he slew a witch and saved a human life. When we first commented on the subject to him he blushed becomingly and shrugged his shoulders as though to say, 'Of course, anyone can kill a witch.' But he would have been deeply hurt had we appeared to agree with this attitude.

Angry ghosts, bad words, broken tabus lead often to disaster and occasionally to death. But not even the battle cry of men with spears so congeals the hearts of the people with fear as the very thought of a witch, the terror that stalks by day and by night through the forest and through the houses of sleeping men.

A great advantage to a Madik witch is that she remains incognito, exhibiting none of the insignia of her profession. More wily than her sisters of the western world, she con-

ducts her nefarious business entirely through the agency of her familiar spirit, thereby obviating any necessity for mumbling spells, harnessing broomsticks, or exposing herself at a Coven.

This familiar spirit is always of the male gender, a twin brother of the witch born either in material or ethereal form at the same time and of the same mother witch. If he appears as a human baby his mother hastily disposes of him, for he is an incarnate accusation of witchcraft against both herself and her daughter. But even as she presses the breath from his tiny body, she is consoled by the assurance that his powerful spirit will never wander far from his sister's side.

The reason that this semi-supernatural brood is such a menace to society is not because they are activated by malice or ill-will towards their fellows; it is purely a question of dietetics. Ordinary mortals may be tempted to dine off the bodies of their acquaintances, but the sublimated palates of the Tubwi and her brother crave the titillation of a meal of human souls.

It is appropriately the disembodied male twin who sets out on the quest for food, armed with a barbed spear or a sharpened bamboo as invisible to human eyes as he himself. Several men described to us having been attacked by a hungry Tubwi — the sensation of a sharp stab in the chest followed by the agonizing wrench which they knew meant the slicing off of a piece of soul. The huntsman nibbles off this as he heads for home, but he is careful to save a presentable portion for the sister who awaits him.

'I have found a good edible soul,' he says to her, 'that will last us for some time. As soon as we have finished this, I will go back for more.'

For the Tubwis skilfully preserve their food supply in the same manner accredited to some of the South Coast Pap-

uans, who are said to tie their victim to a tree and cut off a steak whenever they are hungry, solicitously tending the wounds to keep him alive and the meat fresh in between meals.

The wounded soul meanwhile is in a torment of apprehension. It knows that it is marked as Tubwi food; that unless it can escape unseen by its vigilant enemy it will be gradually hacked away to nothing. In the hope of eluding its persecutor, its human habitation may make a dash for obscurity. Crawling under creepers, doubling in its tracks, stealing silently along unfrequented paths, it seeks to dodge its lynx-eyed hunter, to find somewhere a far-off shelter unknown to him. Sometimes it is successful and the angry Tubwis, balked of their prey, attack another soul with redoubled energy and viciousness, eager simultaneously to satiate their whetted appetites and revenge themselves against mankind. More often the hunted soul is run to earth, for swift and clever beyond the power of ordinary mortals must he be who can outwit a spirit, who can hide from invisible eyes and guard himself from unseen weapons.

One day Sejak's friend, the wall-eyed Unsit, was travelling through the forest. Impatient and foolhardy, he had decided not to wait until someone else felt impelled to follow the same route, but to risk the trip by himself. He arrived in Sejut with haunted eyes and a terrible pain in his chest. He had felt the bamboo blade of a Tubwi entering into him and he was a man without hope. His friends called in Sejak, and Sejak said:

'Do not try to run away from the Tubwi yet. First I will see if I can kill it.'

That night after Unsit had laid his kakoya on the floor and gone to sleep, Sejak sat up watching on the steps to the house, his spear and a big stick lying beside him.

‘The Tubwi,’ he thought to himself, ‘will be following Unsit closely. Probably he will attack again tonight.’

Now, a Tubwi, as I have mentioned, is invisible to most people, and that is why men like Sejak require very special training to sharpen their eyes sufficiently to see into the unseen world. It was very late and Sejak was beginning to despair when suddenly his well-trained ears heard an inaudible rustling. He stiffened and peered into the flickering shadows; then with a great shout he leapt from the steps and the aroused and astonished household saw him engaging in a wild struggle with nothing at all. After a last tremendous whack at the ground he gave a triumphant cry and returned to the house saying:

‘The Tubwi is dead. It came in the form of a snake and I have killed it. Unsit will now be well.’

His trembling friends peered at the spot where Sejak had demolished the snake but there was nothing to be seen. The following morning Unsit was miraculously recovered, but it was not until several days later that the actual identity of the Tubwi was revealed. Then it was heard that the same night in which Sejak slew the invisible snake, a woman named Malanu had died for no apparent reason at Swailbe. The human female Tubwi cannot survive her alter ego, nor he her. As they came into the world together, so together they must leave it, and when Malanu’s death became known it was obvious that Sejak had truly killed his witch.

\* \* \* \*

Sometimes a dying man is vouchsafed a glimpse of his Tubwi murderer. The woman witch is unmistakably the higher in command — and though she sends her brother out to the preliminary skirmishes, she is apt to take a hand herself towards the end. The last morsel of a soul is supposed

to be the most delectable, and frequently she chooses to give the coup de grâce and avail herself of it. As she lifts her bamboo dagger to plunge it into her victim's throat, his clouded eyes may clear for one brief and horrible vision, and with a strangled cry he shouts the name of his psychophagous murderer.

One cannot help feeling sorry for the woman who has, by the hallucinations or the spite of a dying man, been branded as a Tubwi. The kin of the man she is supposed to have murdered are prancing for justice against her. If her family stand by her, unconvinced of her guilt, she may be given the dubious opportunity of taking the hot-water test, with a fifty-fifty chance of proving herself innocent. But often her husband and her relations are so appalled at the thought of the dangerous monster they have unwittingly harboured that they hand the woman over without a protest, receiving gratefully in exchange some child recently captured in a raid. For the self-appointed agents of justice the disposal of the Tubwi that they have acquired is no sinecure. They dare not kill her and they dare not keep her alive.

It is here that the San or trading partners come in very usefully again. Her first captor marches the witch as fast as possible to his nearest San and requests, in the name of friendship, that he take her over. This San, anxious to be relieved as quickly as possible of his unwelcome responsibility, sets out immediately with her on the journey to a San of *his*. If anyone is lucky enough to have a San among the wild Mari tribe of the Karon, she is rushed to them, for the Mari have no fear of a Madik Tubwi and murder her without the slightest hesitation. Failing a Mari San, the only hope is that the woman, kept incessantly on the run, will very soon die from sheer exhaustion.

This sounds distressingly brutal, but the Madik, like our own not so remote forebears, believes he is ridding the community of a very present danger, and his method is surely no more inhuman than a well-attended bonfire in which the witch is burnt alive. I am thankful that while we lived in Sainke Doek the Tubwis were quiescent. Just before our arrival Sassodet had died the sort of death that was apparently suggestive of a Tubwi's greed, but the flash of second sight was denied to his last moments and, with no clue to the identity of the devourer of his soul, the matter was not pursued any further.

There is pathos in the fate of the starved and weary woman, powerless to prove herself an ordinary human being, driven like a pariah through the jungle until she dies. But she is not the only pitiful figure. There must be compassion, too, for those enslaved by the beliefs that cause her fate, for the natives who live afraid, never daring to be alone, haunted by the spectre of unseen presences hungering to gobble up their souls. To the Madik the soul is an integral necessity; with its loss his body dies. His fragile soul-substance is as much at the mercy of attack from the invisible world as is his bare brown body vulnerable to the enemy's spear. It is small wonder that he has developed a philosophy of resignation, of casual acceptance of the march of life and death, that he lives only in the present moment with the future so insecure.

\* \* \* \*

One day Sejak came tearfully to us and announced that he must leave. His wife, whom he had left at home, was to have a baby, and the time had come for him to build the little house where she must take up residence after it was born.



Considering his important rôle in our lives, we had decided that our second piece of Mle should be presented to Sejak. We knew that he would have to have one, in any case, to give his child a name.

Sejak's broad face shone with pleasure, but he accepted our gift with his usual polite gravity.

'Now I have a Mle to name my child,' he said. 'If it is a boy, it will take the Tuan's name. If it is a girl, I will give it the Nunya's.'

He packed the cloth carefully and started for home, promising to return before we left. Knowing Papuan ideas of the passage of time we scarcely expected to see him again. To our pleased surprise he appeared about two weeks before our departure, very shy with us after so long a separation, and accompanied by the wall-eyed Unsit.

'How about the baby?' we asked.

'It's a girl,' he said, beaming.

'Good,' we said. 'When she grows up you can get a lot of cloth for her.'

'I want her to have the Nunya's name,' he said hesitantly, 'because you gave me the naming cloth. But I don't know what it is.'

We told him four times that afternoon, but it seemed very difficult for him to grasp. It has, after all, baffled others than Papuans. For the next two weeks we had to go over it several times a day.

'Ka-ris,' we would say in an emphatic phonetic manner.

'Ka-ris,' he and Unsit would repeat slowly and with great precision.

When we finally took our departure, Sejak and his friend accompanied us on the two day walk down to the coast. After a sorrowful farewell on the beach we climbed into the native canoe waiting for us. With shouts and grunts we

were pushed out over the breakers and the paddlers started up. Suddenly there was a great sound of splashing beside us and we poked our heads out from under the roof. Sejak, in water to his chest, was clutching the outrigger.

‘What is the Nunya’s name?’ he shouted.

‘Ka-ris,’ we said in unison.

‘Ka-ris!’ he screamed to Unsit, who on the shore was listening with his hand behind his ear. We pictured them on their five-day trip back to Sejut, alternately saying ‘Ka-ris’ to each other all the way home.

# Nine

## Saké the statesman

BY FAR the most remarkable character in Sainke Doek was Saké. He was the head or 'Bai Shie' of the largest and most important Madik clan, the Yakwam, proudly descended from the lady who fell from the sky. Besides this position, Saké was also headman of Sainke Doek. The government appoints these 'Kapala Kampongs,' as they are called, generally choosing a man of previous influence in the district. Good Kapala Kampongs are provided with khaki uniforms in which they display themselves on state occasions. The next step in promotion is a set of brass buttons to hold the uniform together. An official cap crowns the most conspicuously virtuous heads, so that if you see a fully clothed Kapala, you recognize him as a model one.

Saké had none of these adornments, for Sapeholo, who as native magistrate was administrative superior, neither liked nor trusted him. He made, in fact, frequent and impassioned comments to the effect that Saké was the worst Kapala he had ever encountered in his administrative career. This was partly due to the fact that Saké was not, like many other Kapalas, afraid of Sapeholo; his behaviour towards him was negligent and untinged with any deep respect. As the son and grandson and great-grandson of Bai Shies, Saké knew himself for an aristocrat, and felt no more inferior to the little brown monkey from Ambon than he did to us. This attitude to him and to us seemed emi-

nently reasonable, but after all, we were not concerned with problems of government, and in reluctant justice to Sapeholo it must be confessed that Saké was thoroughly unreliable. In contrast to the irresponsible gaiety, the dark superstition, the transparent guile and honesty of the average Madik, he was intelligent and crafty, keeping his own counsel, wrapped in the mantle of his own subtleties.

He belonged whole-heartedly to the school of subterfuge. Never go after a thing directly if there is a roundabout way of reaching it, was his leading precept. And considering most of the things he was after, it was probably just as well that he attempted to conceal his purpose. We used to be vastly amused by his machinations. His face was under the strictest control, disciplined to adapt itself becomingly to any situation which might arise. His imagination was resourceful enough to make all his statements sound plausible, his approach was disarming, and his logic unassailable. We were many stages behind him in the arts of statecraft, and were inordinately pleased with ourselves the few times we brought the twinkle to his eyes which signalled the silent acknowledgment: 'Touché.'

One day he came to call on us, accepted a cigarette with gracious thanks, enquired courteously about our respective healths, and then allowed his expression of cordial greeting slowly to slip into one of deep seriousness which gradually intensified into active, woebegone melancholy. This necessitated, as anyone will discover if he practises it, a concentrated gaze into the middle or far distance, the pathos of which was occasionally marred by furtive glances at us to ascertain his effect. Warily we ignored these manifestations, even when accompanied by well-spaced sighs of despair. Perhaps it was unsporting not to question him, but we knew that we were more in need of an initial advantage

than he. In spite of our lack of co-operation we heard presently the familiar words:

‘I am in great trouble.’

The battle was on and there was no further escape.

‘What is it, Saké?’ one of us asked guardedly.

‘I have no money to pay my taxes,’ Saké said with a tragic gesture of upturned empty palms. ‘Tuan Sapeholo says; “No pay taxes, go to jail.” I say: “I go jail, what happens my people?” The little Tuan says: “The Tuan and Nunya have good hearts. You go ask them to give you two and a half guilders.” Of course,’ said Saké, casting down his eyes, ‘I myself would never think of asking the Tuan and Nunya for a “Ringit,” but the little Tuan said to.’

This incredible effrontery almost upset our equilibrium. The thought of the endless high-pitched vituperation in which Sapeholo would have indulged could he have been privileged to overhear such taking of his name in vain sent cold shivers up my spine.

‘It was certainly not nice of Tuan Sapeholo to suggest that,’ said Freddy gravely. ‘What do you think, Saké? Are there any more pig about?’

Pig hunting was solemnly discussed for a few minutes. But Saké was not so easily sidetracked.

‘You know that mourning ceremony I was telling you about, Nunya?’ he asked presently. ‘I thought we could have it soon, before you went away. But if I have to go all through the jungle searching for money to pay my taxes, there will be no time to make it.’

‘From cajolery to threats,’ I thought bitterly. Saké knew our hearts were set on seeing this ceremony; I had been wheedling him into it for months.

We were adamant about the two and a half guilders. It would have been a hopeless precedent to set. It ended by

our presenting Saké with a large tin of pipe tobacco to make up for not giving him the money he had so gracefully requested and which, whatever it might have been intended for, was certainly not meant for taxes. Saké had won again.

When we first arrived, Saké suspected us of being government spies, stoolpigeons of Sapeholo, and he guarded his tribal secrets carefully from us. It was a perfectly natural reaction to be suspicious of us, especially in an individual who himself was crammed with ulterior motives. For us, however, it was very awkward. Skolabé, who had no reticences, talked at length with me one day about Madik spirits and ghosts and Saké got wind of it. He was furious with Skolabé and reprimanded him severely for giving any information away. This made Skolabé furious with Saké and he indignantly told us about it. Unfortunately the very next day an epidemic of flu, brought by a visiting coastal native, hit Sainke Doek, and Skolabé, who slept in the same house with him, was the first victim. After a day or two of misery he left us, starting off on a tour of the jungle to dodge the malignant spirits which had brought him this sickness. One by one others succumbed, though I soon lost track of how many, for I got it myself. Although he didn't say so in words, we realized that for Saké there was only one obvious explanation of the situation; the judgment of the spirits was being visited on the tribe owing to my impertinent curiosity.

When I had recovered we decided we must take steps to secure his friendship. He could, after all, close the mouths of all his people. One day when Freddy was out hunting I saw Saké passing the house and hailed him. Diplomatic as always, he implied that he had intended coming to call that very moment.

Picking my words as carefully as our respective profi-

ciencies in Malay would permit, I made a very long speech. I told him how badly we felt that he wouldn't trust us; how shocked we were that he considered us responsible for an illness imported from the coast; how anxious we were to be friends with his people.

Saké countered this burst of naïve candour by gravely assuring me that my assumptions were quite incorrect, that never for a moment had he doubted our good faith and how could we doubt his? He smoothly manipulated me into the position of having been a boor to bring the subject up at all.

'Well, you old rascal, I know how to fix you,' I muttered half aloud. From the godown I brought a large paper package which contained one of our Sorong Mle.

'Of course we are friends,' I said solemnly. 'In token of this friendship which exists between you and us we have brought all the way from Sorong a gift for you.'

When he had clumsily unwrapped the package Saké stared thunderstruck at its contents. Then he clutched it convulsively to him and rocked back and forth in ecstasy.

'You have given me a Mle,' he crooned. 'We are truly San. Now I will always call you "Mama" because you are my mother and the Tuan is my father.'

It was worth enduring these ludicrous appellations, for from then on Saké mistrusted us no longer. Like the doffing of a cloak, all his reticences and suspicions fell from him. He spent most of his days with us, lying on the veranda floor, his legs curled up in front of him, looking like a gigantic black baby in its crib.

In lieu of the uniform he had not achieved, Saké had a shirt in which he took enormous pride. Originally it must have belonged to a gorilla, for its sleeves were about four feet long and flapped against his knees when he walked. Generally he carried it in a bundle on top of his head until

he reached our steps. There he would struggle into it, with Emdur's assistance, and trip up onto the veranda, saluting inside one sleeve. Once he heard of my prowess with needle and thread he came to me to have his shirt fitted. In shortening the sleeves of this venerable garment, I saw that it also hailed from the United States, and it seemed odd that the three of us should have travelled so far to meet in Sainke Doek.

We never had any idea how old Saké was, nor, of course, did he. When his beard had grown and events weighed heavily on him, he looked an old man. Clean-shaven and smiling, he had the buoyancy of youth. He was not tall, but broad-shouldered and muscular, with an unfettered grace of movement and gesture, and he walked with the unconscious dignity of royalty, dominating any assembly, addressing his people with the fire and staccato eloquence of the born orator.

Moreover, he had good reason for his suspicions and circuitous methods, for his position was not an enviable one. He was simultaneously a representative of his people and of the government, and there was very little agreement between the desires and intentions of the two. The Madik did not know quite what to make of the government, or 'Companyi,' as they called it. Their first inkling, beyond vague rumours, that such a thing existed was four years before our arrival on the occasion of their last cannibal raid. In spite of the opinion of Sapeholo, who was courageous enough to live among them in mortal terror, the Madik seemed to be fundamentally a gentle, peaceable people, easily intimidated, anxious to avoid trouble, and so they accepted the existence and supervision of the government because they didn't know how not to, and because they were afraid.

It must be interpolated that they did appreciate the se-



curity the government had brought them. One day a large contingent of fierce Kalaos Moi came to Sainke Doek to work on Sapeholo's new house. The Madik were nervous, but Sejak said:

'Before we should have been very frightened of these men. Now we know that the Company will not let them hurt us.'

Sapeholo, when he wished men to work for him, ordered Saké to produce them, freely dangling the threat of jail over them when anything slightly displeased him. Those who had been to jail had been well treated there, but they had had to work and, most effective of all, the jail was in Sorong and not in Sainke Doek. Exile to a Madik was the equivalent of a death penalty.

Saké did not want to go to jail, but at the same time he did not like to make his people unhappy by coercion, nor actually had he the power to do so. He turned a deaf ear to the rattle of their kakoyas as they packed up to slip off into the jungle. Then he would go to Sapeholo, an expression of extreme distress on his face, and say:

'What can I do? In the night they all ran away.'

Sapeholo would rail and scream at him, telling him what a bad Kapala he was; others managed to keep their villages under control. Saké would slip over to our house and recount his interview, half-worried, half-amused. We tried never to condole with him, thinking it would have been disrespectful to the government, but we sympathized so much more with Saké than with Sapeholo that it was difficult to remain detached.

It was very hard on the few men, loyal to Saké, who did obey his indirect orders, for to them fell the lion's share of the labour. One reason why I had little difficulty in securing informants was that our house was sanctuary. Any

man who could say that the Nunya required his services was free to sit on our veranda and smoke our cigarettes, in return for which all that was asked of him was conversation on his favourite topics.

Saké's family life was no more typically Madik than his own character. Emdur, his third wife, was the scandal of Sainke Doek. We first heard delicate references to her misdeeds from Sapeholo, and discounted most of them as a mixture of Ambonese piety and anti-Papuan bias. Subsequently we discovered that even some of the Madik raised their eyebrows at mention of her name. According to Madik custom, if a man and woman have an affair which does not culminate in matrimony, neither is supposed to be in the same house at the same time ever again, nor ever to speak to each other. Skolabé remarked one day with a giggle that he and Sejak were the only men in Sainke Doek who could still converse with Emdur.

'But,' said Skolabé, 'I am afraid of her. If I found myself alone with her I should run away. I should be afraid she would pinch me.'

A surreptitious pinch is the Madik invitation to — well, an affair. According to the men these pinches are always administered by the women. Whether that is a matter of formal etiquette or another of Adam's excuses I was never certain.

Sapeholo also maintained that Saké made a very good thing out of Emdur's infidelities, levying a toll on her admirers. It is quite customary for a wronged husband or wife to demand some sort of compensation, but in general it is regarded as a solemn peace offering, a plea for leniency and forgiveness, and a just settlement preferable to the alternative of death. Again we were undecided as to whether this were another sample of Saké's villainy or of Sapeholo's malice.

One day, ambling home through the village from the jungle, we encountered Saké and stopped to speak with him for a few minutes. Rebo, who was always frightened of halts in the village, seething with strange dogs and people, clung to my shin in an agony of apprehension. Suddenly a pretty young woman, wisps of cassowary feather waving gaily in the sides of her nose, ran up to us with a bouquet of green leaves.

‘My wife makes a present of Kankung to Rebo,’ said Saké.

Kankung is a great delicacy for humans as well as for tree-kangaroos and we thanked Emdur profusely, at which she giggled and then covered her giggle with her hand.

The next day Emdur came to our house and announced that she was prepared to give me a Madik lesson. We sat on the steps for an hour while she pointed at whatever she could see and softly and rapidly murmured the name for it. When we had exhausted everything in sight she requested a piece of string and proceeded to entertain me by making elaborate cat’s-cradle figures which shifted one into the other with kaleidoscopic rapidity over her nimble brown fingers.

Not having to worry about her morals or her pinches, I soon grew to like this Madik Messalina. She was less shy than most of the Madik women and very well-mannered. I was gratified that she treated me as an equal with whom she was on friendly terms. If I made her a present of a sarong or a plate she promptly reciprocated with a basket of sago or a new armband. She apparently felt it would be undignified for either of us to receive or confer favours on the other.

Were anyone ever to challenge the Madik’s capacity for falling in love, he could receive proof to the contrary by

contemplating Saké and Emdur. For all Emdur's rumoured peccadilloes, it was obviously no humdrum connubial companionship which existed between the two of them. There were laughter and tears, tempests and reconciliations, heights and depths such as only occur in the really grand passions.

Though each had been married twice before, out of these five marriages only one child had ensued — little Kam, son of Saké by his first wife. Kam's mother had died what must have been a natural death, for no aspersions were cast, no insinuations made. Then Saké married Ayo. By this time Emdur's first husband had 'divorced' her, doubtless with ample justification, and she had married Semblit.

It was during the period of these respective domestic arrangements that the last Madik cannibal raid took place. Emdur's husband, who had actually speared someone, was given six years in jail, whereas Saké, whose aim was not so lucky, was only given one for having been a participant. Saké returned from jail to Ayo and Kam. Emdur, never expecting to see Semblit again, had come from his garden to Sainke Doek. Thus, for the first time in several years, she and Saké met again. The strange chemical reactions of love must have started promptly to work, for within a week Saké had told Ayo (most men would have asked) that he intended to take Emdur as a subsidiary wife. Ayo flatly refused to countenance this. Ordinarily the word of the first wife is law in such circumstances, which may account for the fact that though polygyny is theoretically possible, we never heard of an actual case. Saké, however, had no intention of giving up Emdur so easily. The next day he brought her to his house and told Ayo firmly that she was there to stay.

In a storm of jealousy and injured pride Ayo packed up

her kakoya and headed for the sago swamp. Now, this placed Saké in a very awkward spot financially. Ayo and Emdur both belonged to the Mialin clan. To marry Emdur he should pay them the sum of ten pieces of cloth, and for offending Ayo and causing her to leave him he owed them four more. The whole transaction mounted up into Madik millions. But luck and Cupid were on Saké's side. It happened that when Ayo arrived in the sago-swamp Sevan-sarik was there, for this was before his marriage and there was no one to pound sago for him. In her dudgeon Ayo revengefully consoled herself with him, and the fact of this consolation came to Saké's ears. Saké, who was nothing if not a casuist, immediately made use of it. Had not Ayo ruthlessly deserted him for another man? Had she not, by her improper behaviour, dissolved their marriage? Did not the Mialin clan owe him a large compensation for such shoddy treatment? So Saké grumbled with his tongue in his cheek, and the Mialin grumbled in an ordinary, straightforward way, but no one either paid or collected any cloth.

In Saké and Emdur's life together there were idyllic interludes, for they could entertain and amuse each other endlessly. When they came to call on us together they were so absorbed in their own conversation that they barely remembered to speak to us. But for every three peaceful days there was a stormy one. Neither trusted the other one around the corner; each was ceaselessly jealous and suspicious of the other. For this reason their house was the centre of village excitement, the theatre of dramatic entertainment. Accusations ranging from laziness to repeated infidelities were shouted back and forth, sticks were waved and implements hurled through the air. Finally one or the other would leave the house in a fury, swearing never to re-

turn. Two or three hours later there he or she would be again, wreathed in penitent smiles.

Once in a while things took a more serious turn. Emdur started harping on the theory that Saké had had an affair with a certain woman in Swailbe. Saké denied it indignantly, repeatedly, and fruitlessly. Finally he drew himself up with official dignity and said:

‘Very well. I will prove you lie. I will take the hot-water test.’

‘Go ahead and take it and prove your own iniquity!’ shouted Emdur.

The village seethed with anticipation. Nothing was more gratifying than an ordeal that might have scandalous results. Saké announced that the event was to take place just outside of the village in front of a large ironwood tree, for ironwood trees are a favourite habitation of the ghosts. Thither he repaired with his delighted audience and lit a fire, while Emdur took a fresh bamboo node to the stream and filled it with water. She brought it sulkily to him and he propped it up over the fire. Then, turning majestically, he addressed the judicial ghosts in the ironwood tree, speaking in the loud, haranguing voice used to penetrate to the other world.

‘O you spirits above and spirits below,’ Saké called, ‘bear witness to my innocence. If I have looked at that woman in Swailbe, let the water scald my fingers. If I have not, let it do me no harm.’

As though responding to a ghostly command, the water began boiling merrily. Saké surveyed it gloomily for a moment and then, with a gesture of disdain and an appealing glance at the ironwood tree, he plunged his hand into it. A minute, a long minute later, he withdrew his fingers without any appearance of undue haste and held them up for

inspection. Everyone stared and pinched critically, but the skin was intact. Saké raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, and started for home, a vindicated man. Emdur meekly picked up the bamboo and followed in his wake.<sup>1</sup>

Gossip is the very breath of life to the Madik. It flies over the country on wings, and over fires distant from one another the same affairs are discussed at the same time. So when Ayo, Saké's ex-wife, long since discarded by Sevansarik, came to live in the Mialin garden not more than a mile from Sainke Doek, tongues began to wag. Every time that Saké was out of Emdur's sight she suspected him of having been with Ayo.

'Do you think it's true?' I asked Sejak when he told us about it.

Sejak only shrugged his shoulders noncommittally. Skolabé, who never gave Saké the benefit of any doubt, said emphatically that he was sure it was.

The storms in Saké's house were stepped up from quartan to quotidian incidence. One night such an explosion occurred that Saké decided to escape. At dawn the next morning he surreptitiously poked Sassarro, his particular crony, who was sleeping in the house, and the two of them tiptoed over the creaking floor, down the ladder, across the grey-lit square of the village, and into the forest. Where they had gone no one knew for several days. It was Skolabé who told us, grinning from ear to ear, that they had both been found, dead drunk, in a little shelter underneath a saguer-palm tree at Kalatim. They had built a precarious scaffolding up to the lowest fruit-laden branch. Under the spot where they cut the branch they had lashed a fat bamboo into which the sap oozed, drop by drop, smelling like a

<sup>1</sup> As we never had an opportunity of witnessing a 'Yakbas' or hot-water test, I cannot explain how anyone ever managed to avoid a scald: but according to all accounts, it occurred about half the time.

brewery and attracting swarms of inquisitive and thirsty flies. Several other mangled and dejected-looking branch stubs bore witness to the tipplers' activity during the past days.

When Emdur learned where Saké was she started at a trot for Kalatim. She was not the first wife who had driven her husband to drink, nor the first to scold him for it. Saké, realizing that the peace of Kalatim was irreparably shattered, consented to return to Sainke Doek. Once there, he decided to postpone the disagreeable necessity of entering his own house by paying a call on us. He managed to get one arm into his ancient shirt for the occasion, but Sassarro remained tastefully clad in his loincloth with bright red nail polish — a present from me — on his fingers and toes. Both of them had shaggy beards and they stepped with careful precision.

We were warned of their approach by the sound of grunts and gasps as they navigated our difficult steps. As they stood at the top, swaying and chortling, Freddy gazed on them with disapproval, the disapproval of one male viewing another one intoxicated in the presence of his womenfolk. I gazed on them with admiration. After a four-day drunk they seemed to behave singularly well. They were not, we found, very stimulating company. After each conversational sally they would look at each other out of the corners of their eyes and burst into shaking guffaws of laughter. Laughing would upset the delicate adjustment of their equilibrium and they would sway against each other and away again like seaweed in an incoming tide.

Suddenly Sassarro swayed a trifle too far, sat down abruptly, legs straight out in front of him, and stared in astonishment at his garish red toes. Freddy, who had been looking more dignified and more conscious of the white



man's burden every moment, felt things had gone far enough, and told them kindly but firmly that he thought they had better retire. We watched the two figures silhouetted against the sunset sky, alternately supporting each other as they disappeared down the jungle track to the village.

It was shortly after this that Emdur very nearly killed Saké. A violent dispute started from some cause unknown to the interested spectators. Whatever its origin, it rose to unusual heights of vituperation. Emdur, caught up in a thoughtless whirlwind of rage, suddenly screamed at Saké, 'Nok But!' This invocation, which means literally, 'Pig snatch you,' calls on the spirit of a pig to enter the victim and slowly consume his soul.

There was a stupefied silence and then everyone within earshot took to his heels. The Madik are very chary of actual abusive expressions. Their effect on the person addressed is dire, and anyone overhearing them may be contaminated, for bad words, they say, poison the very air around them. One day little Branis ran up onto our veranda and crouched on his heels in a corner, his eyes wide with fear. We tried to cajole him into telling his trouble, but he was at first too frightened to speak. Finally a torrent of words tumbled out. He had done something to annoy an older girl and in a fit of temper she had cried out, 'Nan Git Wun!' to him. This was pure obscenity, but he believed it would make him so sick that he would probably die. Freddy and I consulted solemnly together and then told Branis with our most professional air that we had a secret medicine stronger by far than the venom of any spoken word. We gave him a harmless pill, rubbed a burning salve on his forehead, and drew on his chest a geometric figure in red crayon.

'Now,' we said, "'Nan Git Wun" has no power over you. Our magic is the strongest in the world.'

Branis laughed with relief and, I'm glad to say, remained in the best of health.

Unfortunately Saké did not come to us for our magic; perhaps he was less credulous of our miraculous powers. Instead, he succumbed to his fate, and became extremely ill. Like all invalids, he had to leave Sainke Doek and travel, travel, travel in a painful effort to outdistance his tormentor. Emdur, full of remorse, and overwhelming affection, followed him with their goods and chattels on her back in a basket. She built little shelters for him, fetched him water and firewood and searched the jungle for the medicinal leaves which he described to her. Finally Saké became so frail that his nephew had to carry him on his back from place to place.

Two months passed while Saké dodged thus through the forest for his life, gradually dislodging the spirit of the pig. At the end of this time Sapeholo turned up in Sainke Doek with his police escort. When he discovered that Saké was not there he grew very angry, for it is a government regulation, frequently defied by Saké, for the Kapala Kampong to remain in residence! Sapeholo immediately sent his police out on a man-hunt, and two or three days later Saké was brought back to Sainke Doek.

With great curiosity we watched the procession as it passed our house. Saké walked alone and haltingly, leaning his weight on a stick, too good an actor not to dramatize his re-entry. We began to believe that perhaps Sapeholo was right, that Saké had merely desired to revert to the nomadic life of his people, his severe illness a trumped-up excuse for a leave of absence in his beloved jungle; it seemed impossible that anyone could be as ill as he looked.

When he approached more closely, however, we could see that he had not been playing hooky for fun. His once well-proportioned body had changed. The muscular flesh had receded from his bony frame, leaving a thinly covered skeleton supporting an enormous bloated stomach. There were deep hollows in his shrunk cheeks, and his hands looked like claws. The spirit of the pig must have dined long and well. Even Sapeholo, when he saw him, was convinced that for once Saké was no sham.

We did what we could for him. We fed him cod-liver oil, we gave him food and unidentifiable medicines that we hoped might effect a psychological cure. Gradually his strength returned. But whatever his years, from then on Saké was an old man; whatever strange disease Fate or the pig had chosen to give him, he was also obviously an ill one. When we finally left Sainke Doek it was with the feeling that the Kapala Kampong, the chief of the Yakwam clan, the leader and the statesman of his tribe, would not struggle much longer to adjust the wants and problems of his people to the requirements of the Government. Papuans do not live to grow old gracefully and sit in the sun. New Guinea, as the price for its beauty and its quiet, takes its toll from each individual — the half of the span of a human life.

# Ten

## Madik children

BESIDES Skolabé, Sejak, and Saké, our most intimate friends were the Madik children. There was supposed to be a mission school at Sainke Doek; an Ambonese 'Guru' (mission teacher) was in residence when we arrived there. However, the Guru was sickly, his wife was sickly, and his children were sickly, so he spent most of his time away from Sainke Doek trying to arrange to be transferred to a more healthy post. Finally he went; for a long hiatus there was no Guru, and then, just before we left, a very nasty one, most loathly of all Ambonese, arrived with his wife and four children, three extant and one imminent. It was nice for us and nice for the children that most of the time there was no functioning Guru and we were all spared contact with him, but the children's lives were nevertheless disrupted by the perpetual threat of his presence. Saké, in his capacity as village headman, had been given orders to produce children for the school. His subjects disliked being coerced, for themselves and for their offspring. They never revolted, they simply slipped away. Finally Saké, by dint of much bullying and persuasion, produced eleven small boys ranging from a possible five years old to a possible twelve.

'I give,' said Saké, 'my son Kam, my nephew Sadwi, and my sister's child Bedan. And I make Nagonbé give Bilek and Basi give Yakoi, and the headman of Selenek gives Branis because he is my San.'

Saké and the other unwilling parents acted like a reincarnation of the unfortunate Athenians shipping their children to the Cretan Minotaur.

For the boys to attend school it was obviously necessary for them to remain in Sainke Doek while their families came and went or simply stayed away. While the Guru was there and well enough, he half-heartedly attempted to feed his pupils. When he did not, there was no one else to do it, for no one happening to be in Sainke Doek had enough food on hand for all of them. It ended by our feeding most of them most of the time and boarding them sporadically.

Most of them were beguiling little urchins. They seemed far more mature than European children of the same approximate age, perhaps because a Madik child very early learns to be an independent human being and a mannerly one. There is no nursery world set apart for children there; as soon as they are old enough to speak and understand they are expected to take their places in the tribe, to accustom themselves to the facts of birth and illness, life and death, to be each a self-sufficient and self-supporting human unit, able not only to look after himself socially and economically, but also to take charge of younger brothers and sisters and cousins. When Nayum went off for a few days with her youngest child on her back, she left her four-year-old son to the care of the person she considered most reliable — little Bedan, one of the schoolboys. Wherever Bedan went he took the small Enjon with him; whenever he got food he divided it with Enjon, and at night they curled snugly up on the same kakoya together. Instead of being irked by his responsibility, Bedan was proud, conscientious, and tenderly maternal. When toddling little children attempted to join in games, the older boys always helped and encouraged them, cut their toy spears to hurl at tree-

stumps, picked them up when they fell, and carried them pick-a-back when they had tired.

By virtue of his position in the first family of Sainke Doek, and his infinitely superior intelligence, Kam was undisputed boss of all his little companions. Thanks to a succession of uninterested stepmothers, he had early learned to be independent of the adult world. We became fast friends, for there was something both admirable and tragic in his courageous precocity. It was from Kam that we got wind of many things going on in the village that his elders would have preferred to hush up. In subsequent investigations we never gave away the source of our information, and came close to establishing a reputation for omniscience. In return we used to feed him, which was something that no one else felt impelled to do. His father was too absorbed with his own problems and with Emdur, whereas Emdur disliked Kam when she thought of him, which was rarely. He was a great raconteur and mimic, and would prance about our veranda acting out the dramas of his elders with a combination of humour and malice far beyond his years — a typical little gamin fighting his own way in an inimical world.

One of Kam's less successful coups affected us quite closely. Uwo had come to us one day with some yams to sell. Uwo was a half-witted boy with repulsive facial yaws. This malady the natives considered very contagious to anyone on the same physical level with the sufferer, so that although everyone was uniformly kind to Uwo, he was never allowed inside a native house, but forced to do his solitary cooking and sleeping on the ground underneath the floor. He came freely with the other children onto our veranda, and this unusual privilege overwhelmed him to such an extent that we had difficulty ever getting him off it.

The Madik seemed to feel that our house was so very different from theirs that the tabu might be safely broken. Anything might happen there.

Uwo was so revolting that we were always over-kind to him in order to conceal our disgust, and when he appeared with the yams to sell we gave him far more than their worth — a knife. Uwo, incredulous of his luck, ran back to the village and showed his prize to the other boys. Most of them relapsed into an apathy of envy — but not Kam. He gave himself up to his evil genius and produced a plan. At dusk eight little boys panted breathlessly up our steps, their arms full of yams. Pointedly they explained that they understood the market quotation on yams to be one knife. Pleased with the chance to vary our diet, we bought the lot. Two days later, as we were consuming the last one, we remarked to Martin how fortunate we had been to get hold of them. Martin grinned.

‘The anak anak stole those yams from Mampo’s garden,’ he said.

Mampo was a Papuan policeman on duty in Sainke Doek at the time, the only person in the region with horticultural aspirations. We learned that he had spent the entire previous night sitting in his garden, gun in hand, hoping for a shot at what he considered must have been a marauding pig loose in his yam patch. Somehow the true version had trickled out, Mampo had beaten all the children and confiscated their knives.

‘Ayo,’ we said, ‘he must be angry at us.’

‘Oh, no,’ said Martin, ‘he can always plant more yams, but now he has eight knives.’

After Mampo had beaten all the boys, all the boys retaliated by beating Kam for ever having thought of the plan. Secretly I comforted Kam. We thought it had really been a very bright idea.

The children rarely quarrelled, but they seemed peculiarly sensitive and cried easily if their feelings were hurt — large and silent tears that splashed pitifully onto their brown stomachs. Perhaps tears came so readily to the eyes of these tough little independents because they were high strung through lack of proper nourishment and sufficient sleep. But it interested us that they vented their feelings in quiet personal misery rather than by doubling up their fists.

One day we had given each of the boys a fish hook and they set out that afternoon to fish — all except Branis, who remained behind on the veranda, looking very sorry for himself.

‘Why don’t you fish too, Branis?’ I asked.

‘Because Bilek stole my fishhook,’ he answered lugubriously.

‘Are you sure?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Bedan told me he saw him do it.’

‘Well,’ I said, rather at a loss, ‘that is not right. Can’t you make Bilek give you back the fishhook?’

‘No,’ said Branis. ‘I asked him, but he said he didn’t take it.’

Presently the boys returned from fishing and started to play near the ‘schoolhouse’ on the edge of the jungle.

‘Now I will get your fishhook for you,’ I said to Branis, with a firmness I was far from feeling. Branis looked frightened, and the uncomfortable thought occurred to me that he had made the whole story up in the hope of extracting a second fishhook from our stores. We went over to the schoolhouse, Branis lagging behind me. The other boys were all there, but there was not a sign of Bilek.

‘Where is Bilek?’ I asked.

Kam looked significantly into the thick brush behind us. A bush was quivering violently.



'Bilek, are you in there?' I called.

'No,' came a muffled answer from the trembling bush.

Scrambling through the underbrush and pulling Bilek out by the ear would, I was afraid, be lacking in dignity. And if I did do it, what then?

'I have heard,' I said loudly, 'that Bilek has stolen Branis' fishhook...'

'It's true,' Bedan whispered at my elbow. 'I saw him put it in his kakoya.'

'... so,' I continued, 'I will go and examine Bilek's kakoya to see if it is there.'

Dead silence from a suddenly immobile bush.

'Who will show me where Bilek's kakoya is hung?' I was then forced to ask.

All the children were looking with dreadful concentration at the ground. Their reticence seemed to me very curious. I hoped it came from their deep-rooted distaste for stirring up trouble rather than from resentment of an outsider butting in.

Finally Kam made a sudden decision and volunteered to escort me to the house where Bilek had left his things. I took down his kakoya and we searched diligently through his queer little assortment of treasures. At the bottom, wrapped in a bit of pandanus, we found the fishhook.

Once the fishhook was restored to Branis and Bilek soundly lectured on the evils of theft, everyone seemed pleased, though still slightly embarrassed. Even Bilek seemed to bear no ill-will, for some time later he said to me out of a clear sky:

'Once I was bad and used to steal, didn't I, Nunya? But I don't any more.'

This quiet, fatalistic deviousness of the children persists among the adults. If a man is robbed or injured by another

man, he either shrugs his shoulders and laughs about it, or relies on some secret and magical method of revenge. It would never occur to him to accuse another openly, or to assault him physically.

Another of the Guru's functions, besides that of initiating the young into the mysteries of writing and arithmetic, was to conduct a Sunday church service in the same dirt-floored building which served as school. These occasions, like his classes, also occurred at irregular intervals. The natives were commanded to appear, and commanded to appear clothed.

Here we found ourselves at cross-purposes with the Guru. The natives were always eager to acquire our clothes. Not a shirt or a pair of shorts did we ever put on but an offer was promptly made for it. Freddy's white cardboard topee with the hole in the top covered with adhesive tape was particularly admired by Saké. He used to sit on the floor staring enviously at it where it dangled from the antlers on the wall.

'How many quarters buys that?' he would ask wistfully.

We persisted in being very firm about their wardrobes and ours. We had seen the coastal natives decked out in ludicrous and filthy rags and preferred to refresh our eyes with good brown skin and splashy Papuan decorations. Besides, whenever anyone did possess a dirt-encrusted garment, it was brought to me, like Saké's shirt, for fitting and repairs. I was bored and not a little revolted by these seamstress duties, frequently introduced by the remark:

'This big hole, Nunya. Please tie it up for me.'

But, through mission and government donations, most of the natives acquired a few European tatters. At two minutes to ten of a Sunday morning the village was the scene of frantic scrambles, little boys nitching into striped underdrawers, elders struggling into shorts and singlets,

women twisting odd scraps around their torsos. We never attended one of the Guru's services, so the exact procedure is unknown to me, but he indulged in a great deal of oratory in High Malay, the official language of the Ambonese church. I am afraid the Dutch missionaries would be grieved if they attempted to quiz any of their flock on their conversion to Christianity.

One morning Saké and Sejak, the two most fluent Malay-speakers — in fact almost the only ones — in Sainke Doek, came to see us after church, contentedly peeling off their go-to-meeting garments.

'What did the Guru talk about?' I asked, more out of curiosity than politeness.

'We don't know,' said Saké. 'How can we understand him? He talks so fast and such a long time.'

'Don't you *ever* understand *anything* he says?' I asked in surprise.

'Why, no,' they said, surprised in turn.

'We have to stand up and sit down all the time,' volunteered Sejak.

'Yes,' said Saké, 'and there is *one* thing we understand. When we stand up we must close our eyes, but when we sit down we can open them.'

Then they both began to laugh.

'Like this,' said Sejak, jumping to his feet and screwing his eyes tight shut.

'And then like this.' He sat down with his eyes nearly popping out of their sockets and laughed immoderately.

# Eleven

## Jungle legs

SUBSEQUENTLY we looked back patronizingly on the fuss and anguish our first New Guinea trek had been to us — and it, after all, a ‘patrolli de luxe.’ Was it possible we had ever been so weak and soft, so tired, harassed, and helpless? We had worked ourselves up to the same hurly-burly, the same frenzy and confusion, as though we had been travelling at home where trains wait for no man, where watches must be correct, telegrams dispatched, timetables adhered to, luggage neatly packed. The more nearly we approximated the native style of travel, the easier it was, and certainly the more adapted to our surroundings. Our feet grew used to jungle paths, our bodies to the rhythmic jerks of native prahus; the thinner and more malarial we became, the tougher.

We had to go to Sorong to replenish our supplies. Sorong was probably about fifty miles away as the hornbill flies, but it took four to five days to get there as human beings walk and paddle. We went to Sorong travelling light, but we left there with the more familiar sensation of being overloaded.

The time-honoured method of coastwise travel, and a very good one too, is in a native canoe or prahu. There are two large prahus in use for long trips, the ‘Prahu Seman,’ which has double outriggers, and the ‘Kalule,’ which has none. A Kalule looks rather like an outsize gondola with seats for paddlers both fore and aft of the ‘house.’ It has

more baggage room than a Prahū Seman, so a Kalule we picked for our return trip.

We were to leave Sorong, as usual, as early as possible in the morning. Again carriers loped to and fro over the hot white path to the wharf. The congestion was heightened by a farewell delegation from the mainland of one of the local chiefs and all his relatives. They presented us with a small vase crammed with flowers and then prowled among our discarded *débris*, picking up empty bottles, tubes of tooth-paste, and other odd objects, each time plucking at our sleeves to enquire if they might keep their trophies and what sort of medicine they were. Finally our mass of baggage lay in hopeless-looking lumps around the wharf. By some miracle of squeezing and belittling it was all stowed away under the palm-leaf roof in the centre of the canoe. By another tour de force the more animate parts of our cargo managed to find place. The old steersman in the stern with five paddlers, six more paddlers in the bow, Martin and a native policeman *on* the roof, our two lories hanging on perches *from* the roof, Freddy, Rebo, and I *under* the roof, prostrate on air mattresses on top of tins, baskets, and miscellaneous objects that never had time to get packed at all.

From the island of Doom we battled against a strong head-wind across to the mainland coast. There is something rhythmically unsettling about Papuan paddling. Paddling songs — and no one would think of touching paddle to water without them — start very slowly. The stern paddlers begin the melody and the men from the bow respond contrapuntally. The strokes keep time to the music and the rhythm is emphasized by clicking the paddles against the gunwale of the canoe at the end of each dip. Gradually the rhythm of the song gathers speed, the paddles splash more rapidly, until a tremendous crescendo is reached, pad-

dles beating the sides of the canoe like the tattoo of drums. The canoe moves by a series of sharp sudden jerks which our air mattresses accentuated until we had to cling to the sides. With a final yell of excitement and delight the song ends — and so does the paddling. Only the steersman keeps his paddle in the water. The rest relax at ease, roll cigarettes, take a chew of betel-nut, and chatter companionably until their muscles and enthusiasm revive.

Bucking the wind and the sea we did not get very far the first day. At dusk we turned into a beautiful little bay, a white sandy beach fringed with coconut palms, great trees rising steeply behind it, and a clear stream gurgling over flat rocks for our bath.

We decided to spend the night in the Kalule in comparative privacy rather than move all our appurtenances ashore. The sea was still quite rough and we bounced about like Mexican jumping beans. A continually changing and rather noisy anchor watch kept wading in and out to see whether or not the Kalule was adrift, but by morning the wind and sea had quieted down.

All day we hugged the shore just outside the line of breakers, watching the changing contours of the coast. The translucent blue-green water boiled into white foam, sucking and crashing against great black walls of rock, or rolled in noisy surf onto white beaches curled in the sun. Behind the shoreline the land rose abruptly, great tangled bunches of dripping green vines swarming over giant trees towering against the skyline. Sometimes we caught glimpses of the high mountains beyond, inscrutable and unexplored.

Here and there a waterfall tumbled down a cliff to the sea, and now and then a cluster of palm-leaf roofs peeked through the foliage of gardens planted by native hands. The sun shone, the paddlers sang, Yacob swung and

whistled. Rebo was mercifully seasick, rolled up into a black ball of misery, not an ounce of mischief left in her.

For lunch we pulled into a horseshoe bay where a broad stream leapt to join the fringed white waves. The paddlers shinnied up the palm trees and threw down cool green coconuts for us all to drink. Lying in the shade we watched two sailing prahus go by, their pandanus sails golden in the sun. Rebo nibbled on some coconut meat and bounced about happily with the feel of earth under her once more.

As we paddled on into the late afternoon we drowsily observed that everything was changing for the worse. We had entered the broad mouth of Dore Hum Bay. Black clouds had piled up, obscuring the clear blue of the sky. The water around us had become brown and shallow, the surrounding coast murky and low. Beaching at a large native village, we rushed for shelter just as the heavens opened. The entire population, which was large, dirty, and unattractive, gathered to stare at us and giggle while Martin prepared our supper. When we had finished, we splashed out in a very bad humour to the Kalule once more, having decided it kept out the rain no less efficiently than a native hut, and offered more privacy and quietude to all our senses. The paddlers pushed us far out into the bay and left us to fall into damp and sudden slumber.

In the middle of the night we both waked simultaneously with the feeling that something untoward was going on. My feeling, when I roused sufficiently to analyze it, was inspired by the fact that I had rolled off my mattress and hung suspended against sharp bits of the débris in the middle of the canoe.

Freddy's position, on the other hand, was underneath tins, baskets, and kerosene lamps which were rolling over him and splashing into water that lapped perilously near his

ear. When we had struggled to sit up and found it impossible, we realized with dismay that the tide had fallen to a bare six inches of water around us. The Kalule had settled comfortably on one side — Freddy's — and water was pouring in over the gunwale, rapidly submerging all our goods and chattels. Neither of us could move without not only falling into the river ourselves but also precipitating an avalanche of what remained in the boat, so we had to raise our voices and shout above the rumbling thunder to our paddlers on shore.

Splashing out to us, they finally succeeded, with a great deal of exertion and conversation, in propping the Kalule precariously on an even keel and we all began earnestly bailing, appalled by the probable fate of our bags of rice.

By starting before the sun rose the next morning we were able, to everyone's astonishment, to reach Mega just at sunset. Mega, the metropolis of our coast, consists of about ten rickety native huts, a slightly less rickety rest-house, a lot of coconut palms, and a long sweep of beach. A few years before it had also included a 'Toko' run by two Chinese. Alas, the wares in the Toko were too attractive and the Chinamen too temptingly plump. To acquire, in one simple transaction, knives, calico, beads, and a particularly succulent meal seemed to the natives an opportunity not to be missed. They availed themselves of it, and no other trader has ever felt impelled to set up business at Mega.

Here we found, not to our surprise, that there were no carriers around, so we remained there restfully for two days, exploring the shore and little native villages, drinking coconut juice, avoiding the alarming advances of a full-grown cassowary, waiting hopefully and without impatience. We were almost sorry when the headman proudly announced he had enough carriers for half our belongings



and our sojourn by the sea was ended. Easily we walked the now familiar two-day trail to Sainke Doek. Nonchalantly we waded through the swollen Warsamson and climbed the hot bare backs of the mountains. In shorts and sneakers we ran along fallen trees and slippery logs, unhampered by the heavy boots and trousers we had worn the first time.

Now Sainke Doek no longer looked ugly to us. The shouts of our carriers echoing behind us, we hailed with delight the tangled clearing we had learned to know so well, the grinning black reception committee that rushed to greet us. All the way to our house they walked beside us, words tumbling over each other in excited accounts of all the happenings during our absence, the scandals, the illnesses, the jokes. This was no longer an arrival, it was a homecoming.

# Twelve

## The house in which to eat men

WE HEARD a great deal about the last Madik cannibal raid; our neighbours had certain conversational reticences on seemingly innocuous subjects, but they spoke freely and nostalgically about eating their fellow men. They were profoundly shocked to hear that in our country a man could contemplate slaughtering and eating his own pig — to them it indicated a scandalous lack of delicacy and proper feeling. But to waste the nutritive value of a houseful of dead bodies would have seemed to them incomprehensibly silly, wantonly spendthrift.

At the headquarters of the Warsamson River two days' walk from Sainke Doek was a place known to the Madik as Sumdet. There little streams chattered together from far and near, and papayas, bananas, and corn sprang easily from the rich and friendly soil. At the period of which we are speaking fifteen people were living in this little horticultural community. Saké's brother was there, and Sassis, head of the Sala clan and father of Nabwom, Yulit's two brothers, Basi's wife, and others. One day Nabwom decided to pay his father a visit and perhaps assist him in tending the garden. He ordered his red-headed wife, Shulmus, to pack up her carrying basket and to sling the baby on her back in its bark-cloth strap. Nabwom folded up his kakoya, picked up his spear and a brand from the fire, and took the lead. They threaded their way through swamp and mud, over the

jagged little pinnacles of limestone ridges, across fallen trees and around standing ones, until that night they reached a stream called Bukis, where a previous traveller had left a rickety palm-leaf shelter teetering precariously on the bank. Nabwom gathered sticks and blew on the fire, while Shulmus waded in the clear water dipping up prawns with her darting net. Life seemed very good to them. The next day they would roast corn from Sassis's garden and perhaps the sugar cane that grew there so tall and fat would be ripe. Shulmus explained this to the baby and he gurgled in anticipation.

In the white mist of the following dawn they were on their way, the baby's head nodding rhythmically against Shulmus's back. The Madik walk swiftly and tirelessly on their broad splayed feet, and by afternoon they were approaching Sumdet. Nabwom, full of eager impatience, strode on ahead, leaving Shulmus, head bent against her heavy load, to follow more slowly. He brushed quickly past the waving tobacco leaves of his father's garden, leapt over the trunk of a felled tree, and came to the house. At first glimpse it appeared to be empty; no one sat on the sleeping platform, no smoke curled up from the fire. Nabwom started up the steps and suddenly froze in horror. On the floor lay Sassis and beside him Sepat, the brother of Yulit, their bodies stiffened in dreadful contortions and with staring eyes. With a great cry Nabwom ran through the garden to the near-by house of Basi. There he saw what in his fear he knew he must see — nothing but the dead. So it was in all the houses of Sumdet. Where before people had sat together gossiping and smoking, now twisted corpses wordlessly grimaced.

For a moment Nabwom was engulfed in blackness, his legs were weighted down by the magnitude of his sorrow and his fear. Then a picture flashed before his eyes. As he had

stumbled from his father's house he had nearly stepped on the rotting body of a dead snake. Scarcely conscious of his swiftness, he ran back to Shulmus on the trail.

'We must run, we must run,' he whispered hoarsely. 'There has been Supo there and everyone is dead.'

Supo is a special product of the Karon — the Karon, home of black-skinned, ferocious tribes, of beautiful half-human females whom it is fatal to love, of mysterious poisons and deadly, evil magic. The Madik and their neighbours fear all that comes out of the Karon, cloaked in the black shadow of danger and violent death. According to their belief, Supo is a secret and powerful poison conjured from black swamp water or the fungus growth on the bark of a baleful tree. It need not be swallowed nor even come in contact with a man; to be effective it must be inhaled like poisoned gas. Under proper circumstances a pinch will suffice to wipe out an entire community. The only difficulty is that it requires some vehicle of transmission. If the Supo is dropped on a fireplace, for instance, it makes the smoke poisonous to anyone breathing it. Or it can be placed on the body of some dead animal left to windward of a habitation, whence it is wafted towards its victims borne on the stench of decay. In any case, all that is necessary is for one person to inhale it; thenceforward he becomes not only fatally ill but contagiously so. A mere glimpse of him in the throes of Supo suffices to infect anyone else. Sassis had probably been the first to succumb to the Supo fumes emanating from the snake in a spot so close to his house; either from visiting his garden or from seeing him the rest of the inhabitants of Sumdet had died.

Spurred by sorrow, wrath, and the fear of residual contagion, Nabwom and Shulmus made a record trip back to the safety of Sainke Doek. Once within shouting distance,

Nabwom gave voice to the volley of sharp staccato yelps that announce an arrival of import. When he had told his story to the horror-stricken men of Sainke Doek, each of whom had lost some close relative in this wholesale 'slaughter,' his audience was nearly insane with rage and the desire for revenge. The murderers must be men of the Karon, that was immediately obvious, for who else could have used Supo? Immediately someone recalled that two men of the Mari tribe, Shadolit and Sakwa, had been heard grumbling and making threats against Sassis apropos of some transaction. Then Shadolit and Sakwa must be the perpetrators of this shocking crime.

Ordinarily a 'Deko,' or raid requires a certain amount of time and planning before it is properly organized. 'Guns' with spears are sent out to all San, relatives, and friends. Everyone enjoys a Deko, and it is considered only sensible to gather fifty to a hundred men for a surprise attack on any household, no matter how small. This is not as unsportsmanlike as it may sound, for it must be remembered that a Deko is not supposed to be arranged as a fairly matched fight any more than the chief of police would limit the number of his men to the number of criminals they were sent to surround.

On this occasion all the etiquette of Deko was thrown to the winds. The thirteen men in Sainke Doek were too enraged, too eager for revenge, to brook any delay. Three San from Salim were there at the time, visiting and discussing cloth with their friends, and they immediately volunteered their services.

Saké stepped naturally into the position of 'Diesu' of the Deko, literally 'he who goes first.' It was agreed that they would wait only long enough for each man to collect his spear and then set out for the house of Shadolit three days

distant. Ungolo had once been there on a matter of trade and felt he would be an adequate guide. Perhaps Sakwa and Shadolit would be found together, gloating over the recent mayhem at Sumdet.

The little band marched in single file, not even hesitating to consider how foolhardy it was for sixteen men to penetrate the terrifying territory of the Karon. They did take every possible precaution for secrecy on the journey, knowing that any rumour reaching ahead of them would mean either the escape of their enemies or an ambush against themselves. They rested briefly by day, moving stealthily and continuously through the shadowless blackness of the jungle night. Late in the third afternoon Ungolo signed to Saké that they were not far from their destination, that every man must move as quietly as a python shifting his coils around a branch. By dark they reached a ragged clearing where banana plants and tassels of corn half-hid a firelit house in the centre. This, Ungolo indicated, was the residence of Shadolit.

Saké motioned to Nabwom and Basi to creep towards the house and reconnoitre. The others squatted in breathless silence. After quite a length of time the scouts returned, grimly exultant. Shadolit and his wife were there; not only that, but Sakwa and *his* wife were with them, talking and laughing by the fire, casual and unsuspecting. There was a third couple as well with a young child; neither Basi nor Nabwom knew who they were, but it scarcely mattered; certainly they were no friends of the Madik.

Nothing could have been more satisfactory. Only three men with spears to fend off sixteen, and a child was always a welcome bit of booty. They must not be precipitate, however. Everything must be done according to precedent and the best Deko tactics. Saké divided his men into two

groups, one led by Nabwom and one by Basi, since they two knew the lay of the land. One crept around the house on one side, and one on the other. When Basi and Nabwom met it meant that they had formed a closed circle about their quarry, and in this circular formation they remained, muscles tautened, bodies tense, waiting for the moment of attack.

Not until the first stir of dawn, the first restless movements of the birds, and the first grey streaks across the black night sky, did Saké start to inch his way closer to the house. By the faint morning light he could just discern the pattern of sleeping bodies on their mats. Two steps farther and he thought he distinguished Shadolit. Suddenly his crouching body straightened, and, shouting 'Watuk!' — 'My spear is thrown!' — he hurled his javelin. From all sides the others rushed in, raining their spears into the house, bellowing their battle cry, 'Waw, waw, waw!' A small shadow slipped from the house; the child was darting for the woods. His trembling legs stumbled and one of the men pounced and caught him.

'He is mine — the boy is mine!' he cried.

From the house there was no sound, no movement from beneath the bristle of spears. The men identified their weapons carefully, deciding which had struck the six most fatal wounds — to them the credit for the deaths. That three women and one unknown man had perished with Shadolit and Sakwa was a matter of indifference to everyone.

The man who had caught him tied the little boy's hands behind his back and put him to one side, for there was still work to be done. The bodies were dragged out of the house and laid on the ground in front of it. Hurriedly, in the uncertain light, the men started to cut them up with their

parangs. Legs and arms and heads were chopped off to fit into carrying baskets, stomachs were poured into bamboos, torsos were carved into four neat sections to be trussed up in rattan, like a pig's. It was important to make a quick getaway before any of the Karon people had been aroused, and the sun had not yet risen when the happy band of warriors set out once more for home, herding the child along in a not unkindly way.

It was a late afternoon when they approached Sainke Doek again, and from a distance they broke into a series of rhythmic shouts, the paean of victory and success. The women and children of the village ran and huddled in the houses, pleased and excited, but frightened as well. In the middle of the village Saké stood and blew several loud blasts on a hollow bamboo to attract the attention of the living and the dead. Then, in a great voice, he shouted to the attentive, recent ghosts:

'We have killed the men who killed you. You are now revenged!'

For this, in their eyes, had been no unprovoked and wanton slaughter of defenseless men and women. It was a glorious act of justice, an heroic defense of law and security, a propitiation of the spirits of the tribe, and an occasion for rejoicing. The returned warriors decorated their heads with leaves and feathers and danced in high spirits, still indefatigable, until morning.

The following day there were preparations to be made for the feast. News of the expedition had trickled through the district and guests had arrived to congratulate the victors and share in the spoils. The possible participants were limited — no man closely associated with a woman may eat human flesh 'because it would displease the ghosts and they would make the woman die.' Saké, who was then married to



Ayo, Semblit, the temporary husband of Emdur, and Nabwom were all debarred. The lucky bachelors, divorcés, and widowers of long standing sought out an ironwood tree a decent distance from the village. They cut saplings and lopped off palm leaves and quickly built what they called 'The House in Which to Eat Men.' Thither they brought their bamboos and their carrying-baskets filled with food from the Karon and there they made fires to prepare their meal. Not a scrap of human meat was ever wasted, any more than that of pig or cassowary. Even the skulls were split open and the brains removed as a special treat for old men whose teeth were few and bad. Lacking refrigeration, it was considered advisable to cook everything at once, though there was far more than even a group of hungry Papuans could consume at one sitting. There were, in fact, three or four days of continual gorging, but after each meal they were careful to wash themselves and especially to rinse their mouths in a near-by stream. After the last morsel had been digested they remained for several more days in their separate little house, for a perceptible interval must elapse before their presence ceased to be a danger to the women. Saké, who knew everything, told them when it was quite safe for them to attend to the last rites and re-enter the village. The bones of the six they had eaten were hung in the ironwood tree to please the Madik ghosts. Then, after the performance of very thorough ablutions, they were free to take up their normal life again.

Free, but not for long. The men of Sainke Doek had boasted loudly and to all comers of their successful expedition. By devious jungle reports the news had finally come to the ears of the Dutch administrator in Sorong. Assembling his field police, he set out for Sainke Doek. When he arrived the House in Which to Eat Men still stood behind

the ironwood tree and in its branches hung fresh bones. The evidence, clearly, was incontrovertible. Actually, however, none was necessary. Confronted with the accusation of having made a raid into the Karon, each man acknowledged it with pride; the fact that laws existed other than their own had never occurred to them. With little difficulty the sixteen impenitent cannibals were assembled. The little boy who had been adopted by his captor's wife as the compensation for her barren years, was taken from her and returned to his nearest relatives in the Karon.

Sixteen bewildered men were marched to Sorong, strung together by ropes around their necks. At the trial there was the same lack of reticence as to who was definitely accredited with the deaths. The six official killers admitted the fact with complacency.

The administrator understood that these men had no inkling of wrong-doing. On the other hand, cannibal raids were not a practice to be encouraged or condoned. So the six leading men of the occasion were sentenced to five years in the Manokwari jail, which they were still serving while we were there. The remaining men were put into the comfortable Sorong jail for one year, where, to their surprise, they were well and regularly fed.

Besides a healthy respect for the government, that year in jail taught the prisoners a smattering of the Malay language. When we first arrived, it was entirely thanks to the Supo affair that we had any means of communication with the most important residents of Sainke Doek.

The people of Sainke Doek accepted the mysterious disappearance of their heroes as one of the many inexplicable tricks played on them by Fate. Accustomed as they were to accept the evidence of hereditary hearsay in explanation of other puzzling phenomena, they made little attempt to delve into the logic or the justice of the new order.

# Thirteen

## Nabwom the unlucky

THE SUPO-MURDER of his father, Sassis, left Nabwom as the head of the Sala clan. Its uncle, the white bush pig, must have been an unreliable and indolent totem, for he had allowed the clan to dwindle to three adult and two very junior members. Having under his jurisdiction only two elderly bachelor uncles and his own two children, Nabwom had few legislative problems to vex him, but in spite of this his life was not an easy one. He must have been born under a gloomy and forbidding star; nothing ever seemed to happen right for him. He was quite tall — for a Madik — and his expression was lowering and surly. Whether this was due to his innate character or to the heaviness of his crude prognathous face we were never certain. His moustaches drooped lugubriously, and tightly pressed down on his bony forehead he wore a broad and dazzling pearl-shell tiara which, by its very incongruity, heightened the impression he gave of idiotic ferocity.

We never knew Nabwom very well, for he was suspicious and resentful of us, but as the history of his life was unfolded we understood why he appeared embittered. Even the occasion of our first acquaintance was inauspicious for him. We looked out one morning and saw him angrily digging a ditch by the side of our house. The cause for his unremitting labour was an armed policeman standing over him, speaking severely every time Nabwom stopped to slap the

sandflies gathered in concert on his back. We went out to investigate this wanton onslaught on our property.

'What's going on here?' we asked the policeman.

'Nabwom has stolen two government axes,' said the policeman, 'so the Tuan Sapeholo said ——'

Nabwom straightened precipitately.

'I did *not*!' he shouted. 'Saké stole those axes. He sold one to the headman of Salim and he ran away with the other.'

'Shut up,' said the policeman, 'and dig that ditch.... So,' he addressed us once more, 'the Tuan Sapeholo punishes Nabwom by making him dig a ditch around your house.'

'What's the ditch for?' I asked irrelevantly.

'I don't know,' said the policeman. 'Maybe to catch the rain.'

'Catch the rain it certainly will,' said Freddy disgustedly. 'If Sapeholo wants to make a refuge for homeless mosquitoes, why doesn't he do it at his own house?'

Day after day we grew acutely uncomfortable watching Nabwom in the broiling sun, driven half insane by sandflies, digging a disciplinary ditch around our house. By discreet inquiry in the village we discovered it was an accepted fact that the ingenious Saké had pilfered the axes — it was certainly in character. It also seemed perfectly natural to everyone that Nabwom should be the one who was punished for it. The ways of the government were inscrutable, and everything always went wrong for Nabwom.

Fate took her first toll of him when, for avenging the foul and unprovoked murder of his father, he received, instead of the plaudits and admiration of his tribe, a year in the Sorong jail.

This was only the beginning of his disasters. The same

tragedy which robbed him of a father naturally made a widow of his mother, Nayulit. She was a striking-looking woman in spite of her homeliness. Her battered and agreeable old face reflected the wisdom of the ages and she carried herself like a grenadier. She was, for a Papuan, scrupulously groomed, and in her clean sarong, neatly cropped hair, and dangling earrings managed to look chic and sophisticated. It always gave me a shock to see her squat on her heels like the others, but she even managed to maintain her dignity in that position — no mean feat. What was really surprising was her reputation. Sejak and Skolabé, the scandalmongers of the village, assured us, with much indelicate humour, that in her day she had quite outdistanced Emdur in her attentions to the other sex.

The easing of the soul of a dead person into the other world is a long and ponderous business. The basic principle behind it is to insure that the deceased become a contented ghost, for an angry one would vent his spite on the whole clan.

There are two policies for achieving this: one negative — keep from annoying the ghost; and one positive — do something to make him happy.

The most direct way to any Madik heart, ghostly or otherwise, is paved with Mle, and the most acceptable Mle of all is a man's own. Nothing could put a ghost in a better humour than for his devoted and apprehensive relatives to set out in all directions, round up every one of his Mle, and show them to him at his grave. This is a very lengthy operation and, in order to make it easier for everyone, it is divided into two stages, the first being terminated, like a wedding ceremony, by a small down payment of Mle to the ghost.

The first stage is not agreeable for anyone, but it is espe-

cially trying for the widow. Sassis's two brothers (since Nabwom was in jail) built a shelter near Sumdet and transported the body of Sassis to it. The corpse was suspended and smoked on a rack over a perpetual low fire, for Sassis's mortal remains had to be kept as intact as possible until the first instalment of Mle was shown him. At the opposite end of the house the brothers put up a circular palm-leaf screen and inside of this Nayulit was incarcerated, for the very sight of a new widow is dangerous to anyone else. Sassis's sister, Dli, also remained in the house, keeping the fire going and slipping morsels of the few foods not tabued to Nayulit under her screen. Besides being a potential danger to others, Nayulit's own position was precarious. Near her defunct spouse she must remain, but inhaling any odours from his broiling body would be fatal to her, and if the wind were in the wrong direction she was forced to sit for hours at a time holding tightly onto her nose.

After six months or four days (according to Madik ideas of the passage of time) the Sala brothers returned with some cloth. Sassis was removed to a crotch-shaped structure in the forest, where, after being granted an exhibition of his Mle, he was supposed to remain fairly quiescent. Nayulit was then free to step out from behind her screen, leave the 'Smoking House,' and receive a new name so that it would be more difficult for Sassis to identify her. There was very little else, however, that she was allowed to do. Her diet was still very restricted, she must not change her tired old bark-cloth skirt, she must wear no ornaments, and she must never, never bathe. Most stringent of all her tabus was that against having anything to do with another man, for apparently the last human quality to leave a ghost is jealousy. These tedious restrictions remain imposed on any widow until the dead man's relations have collected his last out-

standing pieces of Mle for the final ceremony in which he is firmly relegated to the Land of Ghosts.

Nayulit observed all her tabus religiously for a while. She was sorry about Sassis and sorry about Nabwom's being in jail, especially since, having never heard of jail before, she was certain that he too was dead. But time passed slowly and life was very dull for her.

If I were writing a novel of Sainke Doek, I should have no trouble in casting the villain, though his appearance was deceitfully mild and ingenuous. Wulassini was not a full-blooded Madik. His father had been a Sigiali boy captured in a cannibal raid and purchased by Saké's father. The Sigiali are a wild tribe to the south who, according to the Madik, live in tree houses and whose women wear only breech clouts. Both these things shock the Madik, and they blamed many of Wulassini's shortcomings on his unfortunate inheritance. Like a lot of men of doubtful character, Wulassini had a great deal of charm for the opposite sex. The charm might further be said to be mutual; Wulassini was a notorious rake.

Given Wulassini's Don Juan complex and Nayulit's propensities, the results of their meeting were a foregone conclusion. When Nabwom returned to Sainke Doek from the Sorong jail the horrified villagers greeted him with an appalling piece of news: Nayulit was living openly with Wulassini. The community had only been waiting for Nabwom to avenge once more the ghost of Sassis.

Nabwom, though he felt homicidally inclined, gave the matter some serious thought. He remembered what the Big Tuan in Sorong had said to him — that if he ever killed anyone again he would be put into jail until he died. Never again would he see the sago swamp nor walk the jungle trails, nor plant a garden for his wife and child. After delib-

eration with his family and friends he decided it would be wiser and on the whole more profitable to allow to Wulassini the safer alternative of paying up — five pieces of cloth as indemnity for his crime and five more as marriage price for Nayulit — quite a tidy transaction for the Sala clan. When this generous offer was made to Wulassini the full depth of his depravity was for the first time revealed. His first misstep might have been condoned on the grounds of a consuming passion. For his subsequent behaviour there was no precedent among the Madik.

‘I will not pay one cloth for Nayulit,’ he taunted. ‘Nabwom doesn’t dare to kill me. Let’s see what he can do about it.’

And Nabwom could do nothing but hate Wulassini in his heart.

The first few months that we were in Sainke Doek, Nayulit, Wulassini, and a green parrot lived inconspicuously together. In spite of there having been no payment of Mle they were by this time, in Madik eyes, respectably married. Nayulit realized that she was growing old and must rest satisfied with the results of her last fling. Wulassini, however, was younger and, being a man, less inclined to reform.

At this time the Sala clan was not quite so small as when we left. Besides his two uncles Nabwom also had an aunt. Dli was a wizened old widow, the wrinkles in her body unbecomingly camouflaged by a scaly skin disease. According to report, ever since what was almost his childhood Wulassini had been irresistibly attracted to old women. Certainly no conquest could be easier than that of an old crone who had become unwillingly convinced that romance would never again enter her life. Which was the wooer and which the wooed we never knew, but shortly after their acquaint-



anceship had begun Wulassini left Nabwom's mother and went to live in a deserted house in the abandoned village beyond us with Nabwom's still more elderly aunt.

The Madik love light and juicy bits of gossip, but serious scandal upsets and rather frightens them. True to each man and woman's instinct for minding his or her own business, no one ever tries to interfere in another's affairs, no matter how shocked or disapproving he may feel. We only heard of Wulassini's latest escapade from the little boys who had not yet grown up to reticence. Their elders looked worried and said nothing.

Finally the elderly Dli, completely infatuated with Wulassini, implored him to take her as a second wife. Wulassini, who didn't care much either way, consulted Nayulit as to her wishes, just as Saké had to ask permission of Ayo. Nayulit answered emphatically that she would have no 'cascado'<sup>1</sup> old woman in her house. At this Wulassini, bored with both women, packed up his kakoya and went away.

Shortly thereafter we were sitting one afternoon on our veranda steps watching some young green parrots peeping out of the hole where they had been hatched in the trunk of a hollow tree. The heat of the glaring noon was over; long shadows from the western trees caressed the humming grass. Suddenly we heard a pounding of feet and a small black creature hurtled up the trail from the clearing beyond our house, the clearing where once the village had stood and where tangled vines and flaming croton leaves crept through deserted houses. The child dropped at our feet, eyes popping with fear, breath coming in sobbing gasps. It was Kam.

'What is it? Are you frightened?' we asked as gently as possible.

<sup>1</sup> Skin-diseased.

'Yes,' he answered with a shudder. 'I have just seen Dli.'

Little by little we coaxed the story out of him. He had gone to the meadow to see if the papayas were ripe on his own special tree. He walked around the trunk of a large ironwood and there stood Dli. Her eyes were rolled up so that only the whites were visible and her tongue was hanging down on her chin. As he stood transfixed she tottered for a moment and then fell at his feet, quite, quite dead. All the little Papuan children know what these symptoms indicate. It may be a compliment to the sensibilities of the women or a reflection on the chivalry of the men, but the number of women who die from drinking poison each year is considerable; it is the only dignified course of action for a woman scorned. Men, on the other hand, have never been known to do it. If a man is jilted, he takes the sensible masculine attitude that any girl indiscriminating enough to prefer someone else to himself would never have been worthy of his affections anyway.

No one felt very badly that Dli had killed herself — no one except Nabwom. The general consensus of opinion was that she got what she deserved for making a fool of herself at her age; Nayulit was rid of her rival and Wulassini of an awkward situation. But Nabwom was furious, not so much, perhaps, from nepotal affection as from the fact that Wulassini had done him another wrong. He had insulted his father, broken his mother's tabus, married her without any payment, deserted her for his aunt, and then driven the aunt to suicide. And for all these injuries, all these crimes justifiably punishable by death, not one piece of cloth. Nabwom became more surly-looking than ever and jammed his pearl-shell tiara well down over his eyebrows. In his hands he seemed to poise an invisible spear.

'Why,' I asked Sejak one day, 'doesn't Nabwom give

Wulassini some magical poison? Then no one would know who had killed him.'

The moment I had said this I felt it had been an unwise suggestion. But it was not, as it turned out, original with me.

'He has talked about that,' said Sejak. 'But when the government hears that Wulassini is dead, they will know that Nabwom killed him. He has so many good reasons.'

Not wishing to become an accessory before the fact, I was more discreet and refrained from saying that I didn't believe the government would take much cognizance of a magical murder. But it did seem a shame that Wulassini should continue in the best of health. Even a minor illness might have seemed to him a touch of human or supernatural discipline. As it was, he was pleased with his successful disregard of all the canons of propriety and decency. He had repeatedly broken the native law and not been punished; the white man's law had never touched him. This was more than the misbehaviour of one individual. It was a presage of that which would follow: the Madik racketeer who flaunts his immunity in the face of society, and, more pernicious still, the treacherous, spineless native who, disavowing his own standards and beliefs, pays hypocritical lip service to a new code which he neither obeys nor understands.

# Fourteen

## Madik chivalry

NEXT to Sejak, Skolabé's greatest friend was Akar, the youthful head of the Mialin clan, and the handsomest man in Sainke Doek. Recently I was studying a picture of him and found myself surprised that to us he had been a symbol of masculine comeliness. It was, in fact, quite incomprehensible until I went on to portraits of other Madik, and the fact began to explain itself.

We were not the only ones to be impressed by Akar's good looks. Lesi was madly in love with him. Akar had regrettably behaved towards her in typical male fashion. At first Lesi had attracted him. They had had an affair and now he was tired of her. As a consequence a very awkward scandal arose. Lesi wanted to marry Akar, and said so with no trace of maidenly diffidence. Lesi's family said that certainly Akar ought to marry Lesi, but that whether he did or he didn't, he definitely owed them some Mle for having compromised her. It was really the Madik equivalent of a breach-of-promise suit. Marry the girl or pay up.

'I don't like that Lesi,' Akar said to us heatedly. 'She is lazy and no good. All that girls want nowadays is to get a man, and they won't do any work.'

Skolabé, who was listening, agreed fervently with Akar.

'Lesi makes me vomit,' he said succinctly. 'Don't marry her.'

'She says if I don't marry her she'll drink poison and then

Sapeholo will put me in jail,' said Akar despondently. 'But I don't care. I'd rather go to jail.'

Sapeholo had very commendably been attempting to stamp out the pernicious practice of poison-drinking by threatening to jail anyone in any way responsible for a suicide. Lesi was the first young woman to avail herself of the possibilities of coercing the reluctant male with this edict. The Madik had been terrified that the death of Dli would be discovered by the government and lead to endless trouble for them all. Playing on their anxiety, Lesi had been disagreeable enough to say that she would consume her lethal dose of fish poison on Sapeholo's steps after screaming to him that Akar was responsible for her action. This threat naturally alienated whatever sympathy she might have aroused.

Sejak took the Akar-Lesi affair very gravely.

'If Akar doesn't like Lesi, he shouldn't have gone back the second time to visit her,' he said with some justice. 'Nobody would think anything if it had only been once. It is no wonder that Lesi's brothers are angry.'

But everyone liked Akar and no one very much liked Lesi. It was unanimously agreed that she was behaving in most unladylike fashion. The harassed Akar made several efforts to get some Mle from his San, but he met with no success.

It was Akar's mother who finally took a hand. She told Akar that the whole tribe was being upset and divided by the scandal.

'Akar, you will marry Lesi,' she told him firmly, and then she sent a message to Lesi to come to Sainke Doek.

We were surprised that Akar, head of a clan in his own right, should have been so meekly obedient to his mother, but most of the younger people were very dutiful towards their elders.

Two days later we saw Lesi walking by our house with one of her brothers.

'Poor Akar!' said Freddy. 'Here comes his ball and chain. What chance has a man got?'

We heard a giggle behind us. Skolabé was standing there with his hand over his mouth.

'What are you laughing about, Skolabé?' Freddy asked severely. 'Think of your friend having to marry Lesi.'

'Oh no, he won't,' said Skolabé. 'Last night I woke him up in the middle of the night and I said: "This is your last chance. You must leave the village now and hide in the jungle. Maybe you can get some Mle, but anyway you won't marry Lesi." He said he was frightened of his mother, but I said: "She will forgive you." So he took his kakoya and went away.'

When we left Sainke Doek the status quo was unchanged. Akar remained hidden in the forest and Lesi morosely continued threatening to drink poison. If Akar could succeed in dodging Lesi's matrimonial designs for a long enough period to be regarded, not as a potential husband, but as an ex-lover, he would be in the enviable position of being tabu to Lesi, a condition that appealed to him as supremely desirable. And if the wrath of Lesi's brothers gradually cooled he would doubtless be left in peace until such time as some other young man conceived the idea of marrying Lesi. In one way it was handy to choose a fiancée who had had several previous admirers, for the intended husband could dun them for the cloth which they owed for the enjoyment of her favours and use it as a basis for collecting the marriage Mle demanded by her family.

The Madik drew no invidious distinctions between the sexes. A girl was free to reject an unwelcome suitor, or to propose to the object of her desire. In spite of being a pur-

chasable commodity, the Madik woman was anything but a chattel. On the contrary, the fact that she was worth fabulous sums in Mle rather added to her prestige. After all, what value did a man have?

The payment of Mle gave security to the wife. What must be paid for is not lightly to be thrown away. Mle, in fact, *is* marriage, another example of its unromantic economic source. The Madik wedding ceremony consists simply in the presentation of cloth by the groom to the bride's relatives, and thenceforward any breach of the contract must be paid for in Mle by the offending party. The women actually were better off than the men, for if they misbehaved or changed their minds, it was their fathers and uncles and brothers who were discommoded, who had to pacify the outraged spouse by returning the marriage portion, whereas a man's similar actions led him into infinite trouble and personal expense.

Some misogynists might even claim that the Madik women were spoiled. In the division of labour the heavier work in the sago swamp and the garden, the building of houses and shelters, the fetching and chopping of wood and the hunting of game, fell to the lot of the man. The wife had only to cook, fetch water, weave her own baskets, and poke occasionally in the garden. In point of fact, either man or woman was capable of doing everything essential to his or her own support and welfare, independent of any assistance from the opposite sex. Husbands and wives alternately gave each other orders far more frequently than any were obeyed. Women had an equal say in all the problems which arose, and the older ones were often venerated as repositories of wisdom and tradition. Husbands berated wives and wives husbands in about equal proportion, and in a physical skirmish the one who got a stick first usually won.

‘Girls, now,’ said Sejak dolefully, apropos of Lesi, ‘are different from what they used to be. They chase around after a man saying: “I love this man, he is my husband, he must marry me, he is my man.”’

But Ubanshap, a plump and pretty young girl, held very different views.

‘Men are so stupid,’ she said one day. ‘They are always wanting to marry me. I like to have fun with a man, but get married and have to work for him! I am happy the way I am.’

Skolabé shook his head. When Ubanshap had left he aired his views.

‘I am glad,’ he said earnestly, ‘that my girl is not like Lesi and Ubanshap. She has never looked at another man but me and I have had nothing to do with other girls. That is the way it should be.’

And that is the way it usually was. Promiscuity was the exception rather than the rule among the Madik. A little whole-hearted philandering at parties and dances was only considered natural, and no one objected unless it occurred more than once with the same person; such a repetition was supposed to represent an interest of enough consequence for a fiancé to take umbrage, or a family to start counting imaginary pieces of marriage Mle. That a serious affair was a respectable preamble to marriage was exemplified by a sordid little drama that took place one day.

Twarus arrived from the south with his sister, Tupnol, walking behind him. A group immediately gathered around the fire in Saké’s house to hear what news the travellers had brought with them. After a few minor bits of gossip Twarus made an unconventionally frank announcement. He had come to Sainke Doek with one purpose in mind: to find a husband for Tupnol. A glance at Tupnol was sufficient to



understand why this was a project of no mean proportions. She was covered with scaly ringworm which nevertheless failed entirely to conceal her unprepossessing features. She was not the type to inspire a man to part with valuable Mle.

At that time there were only two eligible bachelors in Sainke Doek, Untademé and Sekukwam, the nephew of Saké. Saké, rather taken aback by the proceedings, nevertheless called Untademé to the house, and Twarus made his proposition. Untademé was to sleep that night with Tupnol with an eye to a more permanent arrangement. Untademé took one look at Tupnol, backed slowly to the edge of the house platform, suddenly leapt to the ground, and fled from Sainke Doek. Annoyed but undaunted, Twarus demanded to see Sekukwam.

Sekukwam had just returned from a month of skulking in the jungle. His absence had been forced upon him by Nayulit, with whose niece he had been having an affair. Nayulit had finally gone to him and said:

‘There has been enough of this. If you mean to marry my niece, give my family some Mle. If you do not, you must leave her alone.’

‘I don’t want to marry your niece,’ said Sekukwam insolently.

Nayulit grabbed up a stick, beat Sekukwam about the head and shoulders, and told him to get out of Sainke Doek, an order which Sekukwam immediately obeyed.

When Twarus made his plan clear to Sekukwam, Sekukwam contented himself by virtuously declining to co-operate. Having just been chastised and banished for having one affair, he could hardly see that refusing to have another one would do him any harm; he failed to realize the ruthless tenacity of Twarus.

Twarus went immediately to Saké and complained. Saké,

always delighted to please someone if it cost him nothing, reasoned with Sekukwam, but all to no avail. Tupnol, sedulously and brazenly determined to acquire Sekukwam, began making scenes, and Twarus railed unceasingly at the unchivalrous attitude of the men of Sainke Doek. Poor Saké, who loathed scenes unless they were of his own making, was driven to desperation.

One afternoon Sejak was sitting in Saké's house, an uneasy witness to the tempestuous complaints of Twarus and Tupnol. Suddenly Saké spied Sekukwam in the distance, lurking apprehensively behind a bush.

'Sejak,' he ordered suddenly, 'go and catch Sekukwam and bring him here to Tupnol.'

Sejak sat there stiffly, pursing his lips. 'I do not chase and catch a man as though he were a pig,' he said with dignified reproach.

At that moment Unzané passed by the house.

'Unzané!' shouted Saké. 'Catch Sekukwam and bring him here for Tupnol.'

Unzané, surprised but obedient, started off in the direction in which Saké pointed. Sekukwam, who had overheard Saké's instructions, darted out from behind his bush and bolted for the jungle with Unzané in hot pursuit. As he ran down the jungle trail Sekukwam looked over his shoulder, tripped on a root and fell flat in the mud. Unzané leapt on him and they grappled, but Sekukwam was strong with the strength of desperation. He tore himself free, hit Unzané a staggering blow, and took to his heels.

Saké looked at Twarus and Tupnol and shrugged. 'You see,' he said, 'I have done my best.'

That afternoon Twarus and Tupnol, both in towering rages, took their departure from Sainke Doek.

For several weeks thereafter the mention of any part of

this affair inspired howls of derisive laughter on all sides. A number of times selected episodes were acted out on our veranda, but we never saw an ending, for the participants invariably collapsed halfway through with uncontrollable mirth and gave themselves up to gasping helplessly through their tears. But Sejak, even in the throes of this devastating laughter, managed still to look mildly disapproving.

‘All the same,’ he would say when he had recovered his breath, ‘such things should not be done.’

# Fifteen

## The Madik and the hereafter

EACH INDIVIDUAL receives his information on the unseen world from his elders; as a consequence there is a divergence of opinion, not only between different people, but between the different theories held by one person. These conflicting statements are no cause for worry or dispute; hospitable tolerance embraces them all promiscuously. Where there is no rigid dogma, there can be no heresy; everyone is entitled to air what his father or grandfather told him; no one is expected to hack it up, Procrustes fashion, to fit into any established school of thought.

One day Saké and Ungolo were regaling me with some information on souls and ghosts and the future life. With an obstinate attempt at logic, I was struggling to reconcile their haphazard statements and mould them into a consistent whole. When I mildly pointed out certain glaring discrepancies and contradictions, they looked at each other for a moment in thorough bewilderment. Then Ungolo shrugged his shoulders defensively and said:

‘How can we tell? We can’t see any of it. We know only what our fathers told us.’

I doubt if Ungolo ever gave the matter another thought, but Saké’s curiosity was piqued.

‘I will go and talk to Naisisto,’ he said later on. ‘She is very wise about such things.’

These disagreements are not actually of much importance. On the main issues, on the general plan of the supernatural world, there is a fairly orthodox point of view.

The Madik believe firmly in a life after death. It is curious that they have furnished this future world of theirs with a ruler possessed of autocratic power unparalleled in their living experience.

Once long, long ago, they say, before there were any Madik people or any Moraid, this ruler Yasido lived, like an ordinary man, in Sainke Doek. He it was who dug out the beds of the Saim river, the Subi, the great Warsamson, the broad Mega, and all the rivers which run through the haunts of the Moraid. He called to the sky for rain to fall and fill the rivers; with the obedient rain there came down thousands of little fresh-water fish, no larger than raindrops, and each one flopped his way to the nearest stream. Then Yasido travelled down to the ocean and there he caught many larger kinds of fish which he brought back and threw into the rivers. Fish was insufficient nourishment for his wife, Yai, and his two sons, Yakli and Yiowarrega, so Yasido took a big stick and dug out the sago swamp and he and Yai made the first sago.

Now everything was satisfactorily arranged and Yasido settled down with his family to live in and enjoy the place he had created. They dwelt there happy in their solitude and the abundance around them. But after a time there arrived in Sainke Doek the first Mialin man and his wife.

Yasido at once fell ill. He said to Yai: 'I cannot live in a place where there are other people. I will take Yakli and we will go to search for a new home in the mountains to the south. Do you and little Yiowarrega stay here until I send for you.'

Yasido and Yakli packed their kakoyas and left Sainke

Doek and travelled for several days. Finally they reached the mountains of Buljendli. Yasido looked about him and said to Yakli, 'This is my place.'

That afternoon Yasido died.

After his death he still felt weak and ill, but his strength began slowly to return. When he felt much better he said to Yakli: 'Go back to Sainke Doek and bring your mother Yai to Buljendli. But Yiowarrega must remain behind since he has tasted human food.'

For after Yasido and Yakli left Sainke Doek Yiowarrega had been having adventures of his own. Curious about the people who had driven his father away, he crept up quietly one day to the edge of a newly made garden and watched the Mialin woman working. She heard a rustle, glanced up and saw the bright eyes of Yiowarrega fixed intently upon her. Being a good-hearted woman, she dug up a taro and laid it in the fire to cook and then called the child to her. He came, timid but still curious, and she gave him the taro to eat, saving only the skin for herself. When Yiowarrega had eaten she asked him where he had come from, but Yiowarrega did not answer. The woman picked him up and put him in her carrying-basket, covering him with her kakoya, and then set out to search for her husband.

When she found him, she said, 'In our garden I saw the footprints of a child.'

Her husband answered, 'I don't believe you,' and the woman replied quickly:

'You are right. I was only joking.'

This prompt agreement made the husband suspicious and he said: 'Come. I will go and see for myself.'

They both returned to the garden, the woman, for some reason she herself did not understand, still keeping her secret. The man looked around the garden and there were

no footprints to be seen. He glanced questioningly at his wife, who said again, 'I was only joking.'

As the man turned to go, he picked up his wife's kakoya by mistake instead of his own, and there underneath it he saw Yiowarrega in the basket.

Man and wife then joined in plying Yiowarrega with questions and finally, overcoming his shyness, he told them that he lived not far away in a house with his mother. He stayed for a while with his new friends, but as the shadows grew long in the garden he returned to Yai. The following morning the joy that he had found in the garden was still fresh in his mind and he ran back to it again. Every day he played in the garden and every night came back to sleep in his mother's house. When Yakli arrived back in Sainke Doek Yiowarrega was away as usual in the garden while Yai remained alone at home. Yakli gave his mother Yasido's message.

So Yai followed Yakli to Buljendli, sorrowful to leave her youngest behind her. As soon as Yai and Yakli had left Sainke Doek darkness fell on the earth. Yiowarrega ran home from the garden and found his mother's house empty. He searched and called and cried and cried until he finally sobbed himself to sleep. That night there was no moon and the following morning the sun did not rise. People had to carry torches with them to fetch food from their gardens and sago from the swamp. Yiowarrega remained alone and frightened in his house until all his food was gone, and then he went to his Mialin friends, who took him in. They would give him a torch and send him to bring them food from the garden he loved so well, and even in the darkness Yiowarrega played there a great deal.

During this time Yasido had been growing stronger and stronger in Buljendli, and at the end of a month he was

completely well. Then light came back to the earth and the sun and the moon rose and shone again. By the first daylight some people walking through the forest near Yai's house found her dead body lying in the path where she had left it when she went to join Yasido in Buljendli. They built a rack and laid her body upon it. When they returned to their gardens in the bright light of day they were amazed to see how enormous the taro had grown, for it was among the taro that Yiowarrega most loved to play. Then Yiowarrega began to play among the banana trees and the banana trees shot up, strong and laden with fruit. So it was with all the plants in the garden. Yiowarrega played more and more in the gardens until finally he never came back to the house at all. So gradually people began to forget the name Yiowarrega, which was long and difficult, and only called him 'Mun,' which means 'cricket.' Even now you may notice that all the gardens where a Mun is found playing are the most fertile, and the useful little cricket is held in great affection and reverence.

Though Yasido reigns supreme over the after world, he is never invoked by the people. His only hand in the affairs of the living is to regulate the days of their fatal illnesses. When a man is in need of heavenly assistance, it is upon Namim and Nabul that he calls. For instance, if he is robbed, he may cry out: 'O Namim, Nabul, punish the man who has stolen my parang.' These two figures in the Madik pantheon are very baffling. They represent respectively the forces of the sky and of the earth, but the personality, function, and plurality of each are subject to much disagreement and confusion. 'Na' means spirit (or spirits, since the Madik language does not differentiate between singular and plural), and Na Mim is therefore 'Spirit (or Spirits) Above' and Na Bul 'Spirit (or Spirits) on (or of) the Earth.'



There are three different explanations for both Namim and Nabul, and one person is apt to offer you all three of them indiscriminately.

‘For,’ he says, ‘one man says this and one man says that. How can I tell which is the truth?’

Actually I should say that the instinctive feeling of the people favours Namim as a separate, shadowy entity, a spirit who might or might not have once, like Yasido, lived as a man on the earth, but whose place is now definitely in the regions of the sky. No one ever sees him, and, in fact, they say that no one would know he was there had not his father or his father’s father told him of it. Namim has no particular function except the unprejudiced witnessing of human affairs, the occasional supernatural administration of justice, and the benevolent guardianship and protection of the birds which wing their way through his vast blue domain.

As Namim belongs to the sky, so Nabul belongs definitely to the earth. Perhaps, some say, he also was once a man and at his death, instead of going to join Yasido, he disappeared into the ground. Here he rules over the ghosts of pigs, cassowaries, wallabies, and all other little ground animals, or else over spirit prototypes of these creatures. Others incline to believe that the term ‘Nabul’ embraces all these little animal-like spirits collectively.

Nabul is very helpful to human beings, though his motivation in being so is anything but kindly. He looks after men’s gardens and pushes the taro, the corn, the bananas, and the sugar cane up out of the earth as fast as possible. This is solely because he reasons that the more food people eat, the more quickly they will grow up, and consequently the sooner they will die. For Nabul and his subjects are enthusiastic cannibals, relying for their food on the bodies of

dead people, the flesh and bones which fall to the ground eventually from the racks on which they have been exposed. Fortunately Nabul and his subjects generally are content to wait patiently until people die of their own accord. Every once in a while, however, they grow impatient, and Nabul has a dangerous means of supplying himself with food, for his allies are the malicious Tubwis. This co-operation of Nabul and the Tubwis works out very satisfactorily, for, like Jack Spratt and his wife, Nabul eats only the bodies of his victims, the Tubwis only their souls.

Except for the Tubwis, this heterogeneous collection of supernaturals is really of comparatively little importance to the average Madik. All but the best-informed of them are vague about Yasido, Namim, and Nabul, for, from their practical point of view, these sublimated characters have little effect on everyday affairs. The Tubwis are close to them, a constant menace to their lives, and the smallest child is aware of them. But they can scarcely be considered a part of Madik religion, any more than we would include a Chicago gangster in ours.

It is curious that the Madik show very little interest in the stately parade of the natural phenomena around them. Perhaps because the equatorial seasons, the sun and moon and rain, behave so constantly and reliably there is no need to woo them. Where there is neither mystery nor coyness, there is no challenge. The orderly celestial bodies are to the Madik a theme for legend, a topic for tales, and nothing more.

To the Madik the world is a very small place, bounded on one side by the sea, on others by the slightly explored territory of neighbouring tribes. Every day the sun walks over the country. He is an enormously tall being with fiery red hair, who, like the Madik, leads the life of a travelling man.

Every morning he starts from the Karon country to the east and walks across the land of the Madik and the Moraid, looking down benevolently on his children as he passes. By late afternoon he reaches the sea at Mega and disappears below it. Thence he must hurry back under the edge of the northern horizon in order to reach the Karon country again by morning. He steals shoots and seeds from people's gardens and sometimes cooks them in the western sky, where you can see the reflected flames of his fire. But he makes honourable restitution by returning full-grown plants and fruits, fat taros, and ripe ears of corn to the scenes of his plunder. He is a great friend of the two Moons, who sometimes spend four days at home together and try to persuade the Sun to stop off with them for a while. But the Sun takes his responsibilities very seriously, and so far has always refused the invitation.

The Moons are husband and wife and their house is below the western horizon. The husband is a thin and disagreeable moon, and when he is wandering over the land no one has any luck at anything. Fortunately he is lazy as well, and after a few days says to his wife: 'I am tired now. It's your turn to go out.' So his plump and amiable wife sits on her heels and travels through the sky and the light gleaming from her round white bottom is a very lucky light. It brings success to the hunter and the fisherman, to the lovers who dance by its pale and splendid rays.

Though the supernatural beings and the patterns of nature are of small consequence to them, the Madik take a deeper interest in the souls of the dead. The Madik are no mystics; they do not see visions, save for an occasional Tubwi, but they do dream dreams. Because in his dreams a man travels to far-off places, hunts the wild boar, or dances with distant friends while his sleeping body lies inert on his

kakoya in his own house, he knows that within him exists something capable of movement and thought, of speech and feeling, love and hate. This, then, is his soul, his Jejen Nok; a soul which can leave the body at will and which, when it returns to its human habitation, often causes the body to sneeze a welcome.

The Jejen Nok is invisible, and its form is therefore one of the minor mooted questions. Its name means, literally, 'spirit pig,' so that those who maintain that it sets out on its nocturnal excursions in pig form would seem to have a certain entomological justification. Others, however, say that the Jejen Nok must resemble the man it inhabits — it has the same friends whom it meets in human form; its tastes are human also, for it sometimes smokes a cigarette and sometimes drinks a tube of saguer, neither of which a pig has ever been known to do. Another insists that as his Jejen Nok walked through the forest he looked down and saw his own brown five-toed feet.

Whatever its form, everyone agrees about the habits of the Jejen Nok, which are of far more importance inasmuch as they closely affect its human partner. Though the Jejen Nok is free at night to wander as it pleases, return in the morning, for the sake of the body, it must. Occasionally a Jejen Nok finds the lansa fruit piled high in the forest and lingers there to glut itself, or enjoys itself so much in Luelala that it stays there later than it should. In such cases the human being has the greatest difficulty waking up in the morning; he rouses only to fall asleep again, heavy and drowsy through the day.

This is an extremely dangerous situation: if the soul cannot be found and persuaded to return, the man gradually fades away and dies. A Newun graduate is called in for such cases: he places Mun, the cricket son of Yasido and

friend of human beings, on the man's head, and when Mun hops off, they know he has gone to look for the soul and to lead it back to its proper dwelling-place.

Besides such careless lack of punctuality, the human being has other things to fear from its Jejen Nok, for this is the soul that is preyed upon by the hungry and malevolent Tubwis and is subject to attack by them on its solitary excursions as much as when it is encased in a body. For all its ambulatory powers, the Jejen Nok is a vulnerable, integral, and destructible part of the body. But not to end in nothingness has the Madik fought his arduous way from cradle to the grave, and so for the emergency of death he has furnished himself with another and an immortal soul.

The Jenklat is of little importance to a living man; it remains quiescent in the body, never venturing forth, waiting like a butterfly to be released when its chrysalis is dead. Actually the Madik beliefs do not seem so foreign to those with which we have been imbued; the division into the body, the thinking, dreaming spirit, and the unsubstantial element which survives.

Unlike the Jejen Nok, the Jenklat is visible; a man can sometimes get a glimpse of it. When he leans over a still, clear pool, it shimmers back at him from the water; when he walks in the sunlight it moves beside him on the ground.

It is when man and his Jejen Nok have come to the day of their death that the Jenklat finally rises and stretches and comes into his own. Shaking off his mortal toils, he sets out for the world of the spirits. If the man has died from ordinary causes, his Jenklat is guided along the southward trail to Buljendli, where he is greeted and questioned by Yasido. The other ghosts crowd around him with affectionate welcome and delight. To celebrate his arrival they clear a space and dance in a circle through the night. The following day,

with eager helpfulness, they assist him to build his house and plant a garden, hoping to make him feel at home among them.

At first the Jenklat is restless, too poignantly aware of his past life, still drawn by the old bonds, and he returns often to his people, hovering over his wife and children and his friends, listening to the preparations they are making for his Besakam, his funeral feast. Not until the Besakam is over does he settle down at peace in his new surroundings and marry one of his dead 'sisters' — some woman who in his previous existence was tabu to him. One good thing, the natives say, about this matrimonial arrangement is the security that it affords to the ghosts of dead babies. When they arrive, sobbing with fright, at Buljendli, they are immediately adopted by their nearest relatives. As the nearest relatives are married to one another, they will co-operate in tending the baby with familial care and affection.

Not every wandering, disembodied Jenklat, however, is received at Buljendli. The victims of sudden and violent death, the ghosts of women who have died in childbirth or from a draught of poison, and the ghosts of men who have been killed by something sharp — the fangs of a snake, the tusks of a boar, or the spear of an enemy — have no forewarned guide to lead them to Yasido, and sometimes it is many days before they find their way to him. They cling forlornly around and under the houses of living men, harming no one, but tapping plaintively on the floors and making sad little kissing noises in the night. When finally they arrive before Yasido it is to be told that their home is to be in the regions above and not in Buljendli. Whenever you see a rainbow you know that one of these ghosts, red from the stains of its own blood, is climbing to the sky. For that reason a rainbow always causes a great amount of

excitement and conjecture. Can it be that Unkwam's wife, weary of his infidelities, has finally drunk the poisonous juice of Semut? Or have the Sigiali made a raid against some southern community and killed a household of sleeping people?

The ghosts of the sky only mingle with those of Buljendli at Besakams to which human beings indiscriminately invite all the dead. The lives — if one may call them such — of these celestial ghosts closely resemble those of the inhabitants of Buljendli. They make a platform in the sky and dance to welcome each new arrival. They build their houses, plant their gardens, and for meat they hunt the Nokbaimuk, an invisible and very small replica of the bush pig. It is only in their domestic arrangements that there is a perceptible difference. Once a Buljendli ghost has settled down with a tabued relation, he lives on in perpetual conjugal fidelity and felicity. In the sky, on the other hand, a Jenklat has no need of waiting until his Besakam is over, but spends his first night with a 'sister.' From then on he must sleep every night throughout all eternity with a different individual, rather an exhausting arrangement even for a ghost, one would think.

Little as both types of ghosts mingle in human affairs, the inhabitants of Buljendli strongly resent a human trespasser on their preserves. As no one knows exactly where the mountains of the Madik ghosts are situated, much less those of the neighbouring Moi and Moraid tribes, it is difficult to be sure of avoiding them, and many a sudden and unaccountable death is explained as an unintentional intrusion upon supernatural territory.

Besides this, the ghosts themselves do not always stay at home; frequently they roam the forest stalking Nokbaimuk, and encountering a mortal on one of these excursions exacer-

bates them. One day Saké ordered his nephew, Sekukwam to set out with two young girls for Kalaos, several days distant, to fetch some Mle that was owed him. They left early in the morning on their long journey, and we were surprised at sunset to see the three of them returning towards our house. As they drew nearer we could see on Sekukwam's face the imprint of stark terror. It appeared that as they were climbing the ridge to the west he had been suddenly seized with a fit of vomiting. He realized immediately that it must be caused by an angry ghost whom he had met inadvertently and that his hours were numbered. He had hastened back to Sainke Doek to die. Bakar and Termit, his two companions, were frightened and quiet. They both sat down on our steps and stared into the distance. Whether each was thinking of her own fortunate escape or was full of sympathy for Sekukwam was impossible to tell from their expressions. Sekukwam's face was green and pinched and we were afraid, so when we had finished an elaborate enactment of mumbo-jumbo we dosed him liberally with castor oil. He appeared unconvinced of the efficacy of either treatment and finally left us, looking as hopeless and miserable as ever, the two silent girls walking beside him. We didn't see Sekukwam for several days after this episode, nor did anyone else seem to know where he was, and we were naturally worried about his condition, both physical and psychological. When he eventually did appear he looked cheerful and normal once more.

'How are you, Sekukwam? Are you well again?' we asked.

'Well? Oh, yes,' he said in surprise.

'The last time we saw you you were sick,' we said, rather taken aback by this nonchalance.

'Oh yes,' he said again vaguely, as though searching his



mind to remember the occasion. Then he changed the subject casually.

We were puzzled and astonished. Was he deliberately putting behind him an experience which had frightened him by the menace to himself and by the reminder of the unseen forces lurking in ambush against all mankind? Or had he, as soon as his stomach recovered, actually never given another thought to what he must have considered a very narrow escape from death? Difficult as it was to believe, I inclined to the latter explanation, for the Papuan has a great gift for forgetfulness, or perhaps I should say he has the faculty of unloading from himself the dead weight of emotions that are over and past.

Much as men fear to annoy the ghosts, they do not hold them in very high respect. To a certain point they can be fooled and to a certain degree controlled. At a Besakam they are propitiated; the rest of the time people only make an effort to avoid incurring their displeasure by behaving with decorum to recent ghosts and by dodging encounters with others.

The Madik are conscious of no great gulf between the unseen world and their own mortal existence. They have the same sense of cosmic unity with the dead as with some living animals and even plants and trees. They assume, for instance, that the reactions and reasoning of a bush pig are more or less similar to theirs. Likewise they believe that ghosts and other supernaturals are, most of them, simply men and women in a slightly different environment. There is in their minds no mysterious spiritual change between the condition of being alive and being dead.

It raises a question of definition to say whether or nor the Madik have what we are accustomed to call a 'religion.' There is no prayer, unless invoking the ghosts or spirits to

administer justice could be considered as such; there is no religious ceremony except for the purely utilitarian Besakam to wheedle the ghosts into a good humour. There is no church, in the widest sense of the term, nor are any offerings, save the bones of the men who have killed them, ever made to the dead.

On the other hand, there is a steadfast belief in the existence and reality of a supernatural world. Is it such beliefs, or the sensations and actions generally associated with them, that actually constitute 'religion'?

It is not then with the distant spheres that the Madik concern themselves. Their one strong bond is with 'Ibi Die' — 'my people.' A man's own family, his clan, and other clans and families with which he is intimately affiliated are to him an indivisible and perpetual unit or organism inside of which his life is closely folded. Only a small section of this unit is included in his temporary mortal existence; one end stretches into Buljendli and the sky, the other into future generations. In other words, this solid block of Ibi Die is only seen a bit at a time by human eyes, the rest of it being coexistent in another and invisible realm. Like a Lilliputian sitting on Gulliver's knee, the Madik can only focus on a portion of the colossal whole. This group solidarity is not a conscious nor an artificially stimulated condition. The individualistic semi-nomadic life of the Madik and Moraid would seem, in fact, to indicate a precisely contrary attitude. Without the evidence of the ghosts it would be difficult to understand the subordination of the individual in the emotional concept of the whole.

# Sixteen

## They shall not walk

ONE DAY Saké came to call looking immeasurably pleased with himself. For once, in most unorthodox Madik style, he started immediately with the business in hand. By a succession of unprecedented and fortuitous circumstances, almost all of the Mle belonging to his brother Sassodet, who had died just before our arrival, had been gathered in. There remained only two more pieces, which a cousin Naisisto was after in the Moraid country. Naisisto was clever and tenacious. She had sent a message that in a few more days she expected to return triumphantly with her collection.

‘So, as soon as she comes,’ said Saké, beaming, ‘we can have Sassodet’s Besakam.’

I was as enchanted as Saké. These feasts by which the widow’s tabus are ended and the ghost of the departed firmly speeded to the land where he belongs, are the nearest approach to a religious ceremony in Sainke Doek. I was very keen to witness one, but, considering the rate at which events usually moved in New Guinea, had not dared to hope that one would take place before we left.

What was even more extraordinary and encouraging was that a few days later Naisisto actually did arrive. Saké brought her to see us. In spite of the fact that her appearance was that of an old woman, she had a young baby with yaws on its head strapped to her back as well as the invaluable

able Mle. Naisisto, who had never seen us before, looked rather shocked as Saké unwrapped her precious burden for us to admire. The two pieces of cloth were both red, with finely woven and intricate dark patterns in their centres. They looked incredibly old and threadbare and were full of holes that had come, not from wear, but from time and cockroaches. Saké and Naisisto both sighed with delight while they gazed. Then suddenly someone was seen approaching and the cloth was hastily bundled up again, too sacred for the casual and avaricious eye.

‘Now that Naisisto is here,’ Saké announced impressively, ‘the Besakam will take place at the end of six days. I have sent Gun out to all the members of the clan.’

Even before the Guns had reached their destination people began to arrive, drawn like newspaper reporters by a sixth sense that something was going to happen. Three days before the scheduled date I went to call on Saké and see how things were progressing. There was a great hubbub of excited conversation going on in his house. When I entered everyone was abruptly still.

‘There has been a lot of trouble,’ said Saké, grinning. ‘Everyone is very angry at Nayum.’

Nayum was Sassodet’s widow. We had seen a great deal of her, for she often brought her two boys to play on our veranda, or to ask for medicine for them. Nawari, her youngest, a child of about two years old, was the delight of the village, and not surprisingly so, for he was thoroughly beguiling as he staggered about on his plump brown legs, laughing and crowing at the world. Nayum had a face like a battle-axe, except when she smiled and it became very pleasant. She had always been dressed in her widow’s weeds — an ancient, tattered, and very dirty bark-cloth skirt. Like all widows, she was not allowed a spot of colour

or decoration on her brown skin, and her hair, which was quite short elsewhere on her head, had grown in front into a six-inch pigtail which dangled down the middle of her face whenever it escaped confinement.

‘Why,’ I asked, sitting down on the kakoya which had been spread for me on the floor, ‘is everyone angry with Nayum?’

I looked up at old Ungolo, sitting cross-legged on the sleeping platform. He smiled, tweaked the cassowary quill in his nose, and shrugged his shoulders. Naisisto was sitting near me on the floor, puffing asthmatically on a cigarette and flicking the ashes impatiently. She looked extremely cross.

‘Well,’ said Saké, ‘in the first place, Nayum never gave a present to Naisisto for bringing back Sassodet’s cloth.’

As soon as Saké started to speak, everyone else began to chatter volubly. When the Madik speak their own language, it always sounds as though a violent quarrel were taking place, no matter how friendly the exchange nor how hilarious.

‘And then Seres,’ Saké continued, pointing at a tall young man, ‘has just come from Sumdet where Unzané lives. Unzané’s wife says that Nayum has been staying there and having an affair with Unzané.’

The bearded Sassorro, who was Nayum’s brother, shifted uncomfortably and tried to pretend he wasn’t listening.

Even I was aghast, for the stories about the Wulassini-Nayulit affair had taught me what a serious offence it is for a widow to break her tabus before her husband’s Besakam has been performed.

‘Naisisto says we should all go and kill them,’ Saké went on. Naisisto nodded her head vehemently, her eyes snapping.

'But I say if we kill Nayum and Unzané, the government will catch us and put us in jail, where we shall die.'

There was a buzz of comment.

'I am sending Yoksu to them to tell them that if Unzané pays Mle to Sassodet's family' (Saké himself was the closest living relative) 'and if Nayum's family does the same, we will have the Besakam and say no more about it.'

At this, Sassorro, as Nayum's brother and trustee, looked more hurt than ever. Naisisto, counting off potential pieces of cloth on her fingers, appeared mollified. After all, she would come in on this too.

Saké's decision held great weight. Two days later Nayum and Unzané, walking warily, came to town. Unzané must have been a man of wealth and resource. In that brief period he had collected enough Mle to pacify not only Sassodet's family but his own family-in-law, who had been clamouring angrily against the wrong done to his lawful wife.

Sassorro did less well. The widow's brother should be one of the hardest workers at a Besakam. Saké sent him off to collect saguer, monster bananas, and, if possible, a pig for the feast at the culmination of the ceremony. Sassorro never came back again — at least, not while we were there. Of course, he might have been collecting Mle to pay for his sister's indiscretion. Knowing Sassorro, we suspected that he would remain far, far away until he hoped the subject had slipped Saké's mind. Knowing Saké, we felt Sassorro's hope was futile in the extreme.

The first step towards making a Besakam is to build the house for it. A site was chosen about a mile from Sainke Doek, just off the trail to Salim. It filled all the requirements: it was beyond a stream which Sassodet's ghost could not cross, and it was next to a magnificent old ironwood tree, big enough to accommodate the ghosts of all the surround-

ing clans. Saké chopped and hacked and told everyone else what to do. The house was neat but not elaborate. Like most Madik houses it had no walls, only upright posts here and there to support the palm-leaf roof. It was long and thin, with a lashed-pole floor about a foot above the ground and an open space in the middle of it where fires could be lit on the earth beneath.

Nayum stayed in a little shelter in the clearing with no floor at all, excluded from the Besakam house until the appointed time. She was kept very busy, though. It is fortunate that in that part of New Guinea personal possessions are few, perishable, and easily replaced, for a widow or widower after a Besakam must start life entirely afresh — new clothes, new baskets, new spears, new mats. So Nayum wove and sewed, not earnestly and diligently, for these are foreign adverbs in New Guinea, but with a certain amount of persistence and concentration.

A Besakam should be a very large affair. It is the best excuse for the gathering of clans and tribes that ever occurs. Usually everyone throngs in from miles around. But this time a shadow had been cast over the proceedings. Nayum and Unzané had profoundly shocked the community. Not being allowed to kill them for it, the community showed its disapproval by ostracism. It simply stayed away. Only fifteen people in all were obedient to Saké's orders and put in an appearance. I was amused to see that Unzané was one of the most assiduous attendants. Sassodet's ghost must have been either very blind or very complacent.

However, it was more important to have a full quota of ghostly guests than of human ones. The party was, after all, given for them. So Saké put up two little invitation sticks, one on each side of the house. They were gaily decorated with leaves to attract attention, and the actual

invitation, for want of paper and printer's ink, was embodied in two slivers of bark cloth torn off Saké's breechclout.

When the hovering ghost of Sassodet saw these invitation sticks, he would seize them and carry them back to Yasido in the Land of Ghosts. Yasido would announce to all his subjects that they were invited to a Besakam near Sainke Doek and that temporary quarters were awaiting them in a large ironwood tree.

Saké came to us that afternoon. His face, which he had trained to adopt and maintain an appropriate expression for every occasion, now assumed one of distress.

'This Besakam is very troublesome,' he said, shaking his head.

'Oh, what's happened now?' I asked, my heart sinking.

It seemed that a strip of cloth was necessary for a certain part of the ceremony. There was just enough Mle to make the Besakam, and without this extra strip things must come to a standstill.

Saké was being more transparent than usual. He knew our hearts were set on seeing a Besakam, and he did not want to use his own Mle if there were any prospect of raising some cloth elsewhere.

I looked at him speculatively.

'Would white cloth do?' I asked.

'Oh yes,' he answered with alacrity.

We had the remains of an old sheet, part of which had been used for a sling, part as a photographic background. I delved to the bottom of a basket and produced the last of it.

Saké's eyes gleamed with pleasure, but his face quickly fell into conventional lines of worry once more.

'That is fine for the tree,' he said, 'but what will Nayum wear? Nayum must have a new skirt for the Besakam and she has no cloth.'



'Why doesn't she make a bark-cloth skirt?' I suggested innocently.

Saké looked profoundly grieved. 'There isn't time to make it,' he said; 'we are too busy. If we stop to pound some bark cloth it will be too late for the Besakam.' (If a Besakam isn't over four days after the house is completed, the whole thing must be called off and done all over again at some later date.) This time I looked at Saké with admiration. He knew that our time was limited and that departure stared us disagreeably in the face.

Sighing, I went into the bedroom and found a tattered old Tahitian pareu, one of which I was quite fond.

Saké tried to look indifferent as he thanked me. But the pareu was red, and I could see his fingers caressing it affectionately.

'The old wretch is wasted here,' I said to Freddy when I told him about it. 'He should be a European diplomat.'

One of the most important figures in the Besakam was Nagonbé, the widow of Sassodet's brother. She was a gentle little woman, still pretty, though her brown face was wrinkled with age. Unlike Nayum, she had always behaved in the most exemplary fashion. She had two sons, also gentle and soft-spoken, the dandified Yoksu and little Bilek with his large round eyes, protruding stomach, and infectious giggle. Both were very proud of Nagonbé. They used to bring her to see us, to show her off, to boast about her talents, and to tease her in order to make her laugh. Nagonbé would exchange tolerant glances with us as though to say, 'Aren't they being silly?' but she was always flattered and pleased. Since Naisisto, not having received a present for her efforts, haughtily refused to have anything to do with Nayum or the Besakam, Nagonbé played the rôle of the nearest female relative of the dead Sassodet.

She also was deeply shocked by the situation, but, meek and malleable, consented to do her part in spite of it.

The natives distinguish seven or eight different kinds of sago. Only one of these is acceptable to ghosts, so the women were sent out to strain a large amount of it while the men built a special little sago-cooking addition to the Besakam house, a roofed-over rack with an enormous fireplace under it. When this was completed and the sago secretly hidden near-by, the Besakam was ready to start. Nayum left her shelter and moved into the big house. Little Nawari crawled affectionately over everyone and staggered back and forth brandishing an enormous knife. This was his favourite plaything, and though it made my blood run cold to see him waving it about, he never seemed to injure either himself or anyone else. Every once in a while he would lean heavily against me and tug at my hair which, because of its un-Papuan colour, always interested him. We were waiting for darkness to fall.

A few squawks from Nagonbé's large green parrot finally heralded the end of day. Nagonbé and Yulit went out to their secret hiding-place and brought in two enormous leaf packages of sago. The fat logs under the cooking rack were kindled with a brand from the ordinary fire and the solemn business of wrapping the sago began. While the rest chanted, Nagonbé and Yulit sat next to each other and divided their share of sago into five equal portions, wrapping it firmly in leaves and binding it up with fibre. These five rolls they placed on the rack over the fire to roast, turning them to cook evenly. When they were done they were removed and hung, like ears of corn, from the ceiling. Then everyone else fell to, wrapping, tying, cooking, chatting, the whole night through. For no one was supposed to sleep that night, with the ghosts so near.

The next morning everybody was, quite naturally, very sleepy. Notwithstanding a few prostrate bodies in the sun, there was a certain atmosphere of suppressed excitement. Kam and Bilek, whose first Besakam this was, came and whispered to me that they were frightened, they didn't know why.

It was a beautiful day — the ghosts had seen to that. I was extremely vague about what we were to do next, and extremely curious, especially when I saw everyone beginning to remove his or her fine raiment and tuck it into a kakoya. In their oldest bark cloth, bereft of all ornaments, the party finally stood ready to go. Nayum, Nagonbé, and Nawari, the principals, remained sitting in the house and paid little attention to the rest of us.

Following Saké we started single or Papuan file down the path towards Salim. Finally we came to a spot where a faint track diverged to the left. Here the party split and half the people disappeared down it.

'Where are they going?' I whispered.

'They are going to visit the grave of Nayum's mother,' I was told.

We continued on our way for two or three miles, splashing through the usual mud, teetering on fallen trees across the usual streams. I am shamefully bad at balancing on narrow cat-walks above anything at all. If I can distract my mind and walk straight ahead, the feat is possible. Like Bluebeard's wife, however, I can seldom refrain from looking where I shouldn't, and when I see eight or ten feet below me a purposefully moving body of water going at cross directions with me, I become helpless and vertiginous. The Madik considered this a very amusing idiosyncrasy of mine, and always did their best to keep their faces straight and be of chivalrous assistance. They crowded around so

assiduously, clutching me from every direction, that I could never understand why the conglomerate mass of four or five of them and myself edging precariously across a swaying sapling never toppled off together with one enormous splash.

It was shortly after one of these mortifying scenes and its accompaniment of muffled giggles that Saké turned briskly off the trail and led us to a little clearing where the grass grew green between the spotted red and yellow of croton leaves. Here, long, long before, had mouldered the body of Sassodet's father, Yabaisham. Now not a bone was to be seen, not a sign of the rack on which he had lain.

I subsequently discovered that it was not considered at all *au fait* to visit a grave until the remains had entirely disappeared — rather a gratifying regulation on the whole. I had jumped to the conclusion that since we were honouring Sassodet in this Besakam, it would naturally be his last resting-place at which whatever rites were necessary were performed. But apparently Sassodet would not be visited for a number of years, at someone else's Besakam. Madik family feeling is, in theory, even stronger than in practice, and Sassodet would be sufficiently complimented by the attention paid to his father to be put in a benevolent mood.

At the grave Saké became very active. With his parang he cut down several croton bushes. Swiftly and deftly he braided the lower leaves up around the stalks, producing what looked like multicoloured feather-dusters. These he stuck in the ground in a semicircle, inside of which he opened up a kakoya on top of the very spot where the dead man once had rested. With furtive pride he laid on the kakoya two Mle — one which Naisisto had brought with her, the other the one that had promoted me to the position of Saké's mother. Then he sat down and lit a cigarette.

Picking a large and comparatively dry leaf, I sat down

too, waiting expectantly for something to happen. Nothing did. Apparently our only object was to wait there while the ghost of Sassodet's father feasted his eyes on the family Mle. In spite of his theoretical proximity no one seemed at all intimidated. Saké, Emdur, and Nayulit chatted and laughed. Yoksu stretched out and caught up on his sleep.

'A very sensible way to deal with ghosts,' I thought, and accepted Nayulit's offer of tobacco wrapped in a pandanus leaf.

Presently Saké looked up at the sky. It was dazzlingly blue and cloudless. He gave an order to little Kam. Kam got up and cut a big leaf off a near-by tree. In New Guinea you can always find a leaf of the size to suit any purpose you have in mind. He screwed the leaf up into a cornucopia with a flap at the top and held it out in front of him a moment. Then he quickly closed the flap down and tied the little leaf box up with a string.

'What's that for?' I asked.

'He is catching some sun,' said Saké. 'If it should start to rain later on, we can open the leaf and let the sun out.'

'It doesn't look as though it were going to rain,' I said.

'Well, if it doesn't rain, we can always use it. We will open it up late in the afternoon and make the day longer.'

'Ah,' I thought, 'Papuan daylight-saving time.'

I was beginning to get a little bored when there was a distant rustle and murmur of voices. Immediately everyone jumped to his feet. Kakoyas were opened, and to my surprise everyone started hastily changing his clothes. Instead of their old bark-cloth skirts Emdur and Nayulit slipped on new sarongs. I was scandalized to see Yoksu fish out an old seersucker checked blouse that I had thrown away and squirm into it. Bilek pulled over his head a ragged silk dress that had once belonged to the Guru's four-year-old

daughter, and Saké disinterred his ancient khaki shirt. It was a sight that made me quail.

Down the path towards us marched the people who had visited the other grave. With relief I transferred my attention to them, for none of them possessed any European garments. They were decked in all their most spectacular ornaments; in their hair waved sprigs of ground pine; each one carried over one shoulder a croton feather-duster from the grave, and each woman had draped over the other shoulder the glowing colours of a Mle.

Our party now fell into line, Saké in the lead. They had leaves in their hair and feather-dusters, too, and Nayulit and Emdur stepped proudly with the Mle. Alternating man and woman, they started single file back towards the Besakam house, the little boys and I forming an anti-climactical rear-guard. It would have been a fascinating sight had there been a hundred or so people converging from all the graves through the forest, as should have occurred.

Once in the Besakam house the Mle were laid out again for all the ghosts in the ironwood tree to see and admire. While the participants were thus occupied Saké gave orders that the living should divide the sago. Each roasted piece was cut in two and passed around secretly in a kakoya, only one end peeping out. It was all done according to precedence, Nayum receiving hers first, then Nagonbé, and so on.

Suddenly with shouts and parangs the men all fell on the sago rack and hacked it to pieces. The débris was carried over to a spot in front of the ironwood tree and stuck up in the ground. Everyone followed and each planted his feather-duster close beside it. Saké, as Sassodet's earthly representative, had received the package of sago reserved for the ghosts. He took a nibble of this for his client and

packed the rest in with the heterogeneous mass of bush and sticks. Then he produced our sheet and carefully tied the whole clump together with it.

This done, he called up Yoksu, while the other men stood about, their hands full of sharpened sticks and javelins.

‘I have a sore throat,’ he explained, ‘and can’t shout loudly enough for the spirits to hear. I will tell you what to say.’

Yoksu stood facing the ironwood tree and yelled, sentence by sentence, what Saké whispered in his ear. By name he called on the ghosts of each clan. Then he began reciting a list of grievances.

‘I go hunting and I get no pig, I get no cassowary, I get no birds. I go fishing and I get no fish. The wild pigs eat my garden. The rats bite my toes. The sandflies drive me crazy.’

The rest of the address, which was extremely repetitious throughout, was taken up with pleas for an improvement in this state of affairs.

‘When I hunt, give me pigs, give me cassowaries, give me birds. When I fish, give me fish. Let my garden flourish. O spirits, take the rats away and the sandflies away. When I go to talk about Mle, let it be given to me.’

‘O spirits, O Sassodet, you have eaten your sago. Don’t be angry with your children any longer.’

Now Saké hurled another piece of sago at the tree for the ghosts. I was just thinking that really they had been very courteously treated when suddenly the whole jungle started to echo with a crescendo of ear-splitting high-pitched yells as the men threw javelin after javelin at the ironwood tree. These were the same sounds they made when they hurled their spears at their enemies in a Deko. The performance seemed to me very unwise.

'Won't that make the ghosts angry?' I asked when the clamour had subsided.

Saké shrugged his shoulders. 'We asked them here for the Besakam and gave them sago,' he said reasonably. 'Now it's time for them to go home. We don't want them around any longer.'

'Well,' I said, 'they can't be very sensitive.'

'What?' said Saké.

'Nothing,' I said.

It seemed to me that had I believed the ironwood tree to be seething with ghostly inhabitants, I should certainly be subject to eerie sensations and vague fears, uneasily apprehensive of the supernatural beings surrounding me. Instead, the Madik perfunctorily propitiated them in order to bring better luck to the tribe and to free Nayum from her tiresome tabus. There was throughout no trace of reverence, awe, or piety, nor even any simulation of what might be interpreted as a religious emotion.

The ghosts had eaten their sago. Now was the time for us to eat the apportioned bits we had drawn from the kakoya. First Nayum and then Nawari — after that the rest of us were free to fall to. Gracefully (I hope) I excused myself from finishing mine by saying I must save some for the Tuan, who had never had the privilege of tasting Besakam sago.

Then Nayum and Nagonbé got up. Nayum slung Nawari and a bulging carrying-basket onto her back. Nagonbé, still looking prim and disapproving, picked up a large bamboo node and led the way. They went to a near-by stream, where, by means of the bamboo, Nagonbé dipped up the water and showered Nayum and Nawari — their first bath since the death of Sassodet. On the banks of the stream Nayum left her old bark-cloth skirt and arrayed



herself in new clothes, red belts and bandoliers, pounds of beads, shell armbands and tiaras. As Nawari had never worn anything, his costume required no changing. Resplendent in her new finery, Nayum followed Nagonbé back to the house. I noticed, without surprise, that her skirt was of white bark cloth — not a red Tahitian pareu.

‘Another one up to Saké,’ I thought.

As she entered the house, Nayum glanced coyly at Unzané and he smirked proudly and affectionately and sheepishly at her.

The business end of the Besakam was over. Now was the time for feasting, for gaiety, for dancing. But Sassorro had never brought the pig nor the saguer. The invited guests had never come. The San had not appeared to talk about and exchange Mle. As I pictured what the spectacle should have been, I became as disgruntled as everyone else with Nayum and Unzané. After a year in New Guinea, after months of exclusively Papuan society, I suddenly realized with dismay that I was thinking to myself a Papuan thought. It was:

‘After all, it would have been a good deal more interesting if they had been speared.’

# Seventeen

## Our education was compulsory

MAKING anthropometric measurements of the natives was, of course, one of our main concerns. By the time we reached Sainke Doek our practice on the natives of the north coast and the islands of Geelvink Bay had inured us to its more sordid aspects. A crowd of thirty to forty men generally assembled at one time for the ordeal, lured by the promise of tobacco or salt and by their own insatiable curiosity. The Kapala of the group would take his place on our little platform first, as an example and an encouragement to his timorous subjects. Frequently he shook so with agitation that it was almost impossible to touch him without puncturing him with the pointed instruments, and instead of standing motionless at attention he twisted his head and contorted his body in an effort to follow every move.

Often Freddy had to hold the man by the hair to keep him still while I wielded the anthropometer. The head and face measurements were much the most difficult for both measurer and measuree. The latter was terrified by the sharply pointed calipers flashing around his eyes, and even the onlookers held their breath; for my part, the necessary points on his face were generally so deeply buried that I had to excavate through a lifelong accumulation of Papuan dirt to reveal shy nasion;<sup>1</sup> as for prosthion,<sup>2</sup> lurking between his

<sup>1</sup> The point where the nasal bones meet the frontal bones between the eyebrows.

<sup>2</sup> The lower point of suture of the maxillae, between the two upper median incisors.

upper incisors, I had to roll back enormous lips so rubbery that they flapped back again the moment I let go. The points on the head were lost in a maze of kinky hair, and to palp an occipital protuberance I had to plunge my hand into tufts of dusty mattress stuffing, wiggling perceptibly with the aimless motion of the lice. By the time I had finished with one man my arms were black to the elbows; each subject must have lost half a pound to me during the operation. Leaning over a head with the calipers I learnt to take a deep breath to windward, exhale, and then turn away to breathe again, for, accustomed as we became to the pungent Papuan odour, too close a whiff gave me the same dizzy nausea as a dose of ether. Why they never complained of toothache was something we could not understand after glimpsing mouthfuls of tooth stumps green with decay and mould.

There were other affronts to delicate sensibilities besides the dirt. Almost fifty per cent of the people, and always the filthiest, suffered from skin diseases, and numbers of them had portions of their anatomy eaten away by yaws. The most distressing case of all was a leper who turned up one morning with some others, diffident but apparently eager to be measured. He sat a little apart from the others and I postponed him till the last, hoping he might get bored and go away. At the end he was still there, looking so disconsolate that in spite of Freddy's ominous warnings I made a shuddering pretense of taking measurements around the places where his features should have been.

Though our enjoyment of the proceedings was limited, the reactions of the audience were a constant pleasure. Once the first guinea pig had stepped down from the platform uninjured by the lethal-looking instruments, the rest gave themselves up to whole-hearted delight in the entertainment.

The discomfiture of the victim, his wincing and starts convulsed them with amusement. They shouted and rolled on the ground as he ducked his head to avoid me, and snickered when I grasped him firmly by the chin to keep him quiet.

Rebo gained considerable repute as an assistant performer. It was impossible to keep her away from these occasions so favourable to her feeling for drama. She would climb onto the veranda rail behind the man being measured, invisible to him and to me, but not to the audience. A sudden breathless silence among the onlookers seldom warned me in time, and Rebo would pounce, scrabble on the gibbering victim's head, and then leap for safety onto my shoulder. All in all, there was a great deal in these measuring mornings that resembled a fraternity initiation.

Freddy's efforts to photograph the somatological specimens were even more baffling than taking their measurements. When they wriggled I could hold them firmly in position with one hand, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to hang on to someone and take a picture of him at the same time. Freddy would arrange a man carefully so that his full profile was clearly outlined on the sheet behind him in the best Frankfort-plane tradition. By the time he had stepped back to the camera to focus, the man would have twisted around and bent down to peer curiously into the lens. If Freddy gave a personal demonstration of what he wanted in front of the sheet, the man would walk unobtrusively away and sit down.

Eventually our problems were lightened by a corps of lieutenants. The Sainke Doek men, who had been the first to be measured and had made a point of never missing a subsequent exhibition, developed a fairly accurate idea of the schedule of events. It gave them infinite pleasure to rush around officiously pulling people this way and that,

prodding one of the intimidating Moraid into position, poking a finger in the cheek of a sharp-toothed Sigiali, and in general being thoroughly patronizing to the people of whom they stood in awe.

‘These stupid Moraid,’ Saké would say condescendingly as he slapped one on the rump, ‘they don’t understand anything about the Nunya’s business.’

Our daily contacts with our Papuan friends were extremely diverse. This variety, though bewildering, obviated any danger of boredom or monotony. The anthropology and photography, which were the basic reasons for our presence there, often seemed to be relegated to very minor positions among our extra-curricular activities.

In the first place, we found ourselves, whether we liked it or not, building up an extensive medical practice. For this our physical completely outdistanced our mental equipment. We had an enormous supply of assorted medicaments that had been showered on us by kind and apprehensive friends. A large part of them were so extraordinary in smell and so cryptic in their instructions that we never ventured to experiment with them. Other things, like our full set of shiny operating instruments, we never dreamt of being rash enough to use. When determined patients came streaming in with every conceivable disease and disability we were not only embarrassed but alarmed. We had a slender handbook on tropical complaints which the natives must have regarded as the equivalent of our Sibylline Books, so awesomely and frequently was it consulted. With a sketchy coaching on symptoms and the brashness born of necessity, we plunged into the mysteries of amoebic and bacillary dysentery, chronic malaria and beriberi, the bandaging of broken bones, and the treatment of wounds ranging from those inflicted by pig tusks and axes down to slivers and rat-

gnawed toes. For yaws, or framboesia, their worst and most prevalent ailment, we had none of the necessary injections. At first we tried to explain that as far as yaws were concerned we were helpless, but found that this was interpreted as laziness and ill-will on our part. Obviously we had all the medicines in the world and simply didn't choose to use them.

Sometimes the sufferer would go to Martin. 'The Tuan and Nunya,' he would say, 'do not like me enough to make me well. Please, will you ask them for some medicine and pretend it is for you?' So we dressed the open sores with local antiseptics, sick at heart as we saw the hope in the sufferer's eyes and very nearly sick at our stomachs from the sight of them and the smell of rotting flesh.

In Sainke Doek, as elsewhere, it was far easier to become a successful quack than a competent doctor, and we had more luck in treating magical diseases than physical ones. In these cases a full degree of assurance mixed liberally with hocus-pocus and something harmless like quinine or cod-liver oil was an almost infallible prescription. When, for instance, Sapeholo ordered one of the sacred Waringen trees of the Mialin clan chopped down, all the Mialin sat around resentfully waiting to die. We were angry, too, and searched our stores for things that burnt and tasted queer and prickled so that there would be no doubt that they were a potent source of life and strength. The Mialin came in a body and we conducted an elaborate ceremony, partly carefully planned and partly ad lib. The Mialin were impressed and went home, still furious at Sapeholo, but convinced of semi-immortality.

Our most serious genuine patient was Saké. Shortly before we arrived in Sainke Doek he had had an encounter with a wild boar. On his way to the sago swamp he had seen

the animal at a distance. Dropping his kakoya, he crept up silently to within striking distance, never stirring the big, rattling leaves, treading softly through the squelching mud. As he jabbed his spear into the animal's flank the infuriated boar turned and with upthrusting tusks ripped open the hand and arm that still held the spear. The fight went on to a finish, and Saké brought the carcass home, but he had paid dearly for his victory. For two weeks he administered his own medicines. When we arrived and saw his bandaged arm we enquired if we might see it; perhaps we could be of some assistance. Saké complied amiably. Being then new to Papuan afflictions, I nearly succumbed to the wave of nausea that swept over me, and even Freddy blanched. Mud mixed with saliva and chopped green leaves had been poured into the long open wounds and a floral poultice tied over it all with rattan. Not surprisingly, the hand and arm had swollen to balloon-like proportions.

Freddy tackled the case with fortitude and industry. Day by day he bent over the shapeless mass of flesh, delicately picking out bits of the Madik 'medicine,' soaking it in hot solutions, bandaging it with geometric precision. It seemed impossible that Saké could retain such a gangrenous appendage, and we felt very uncomfortable about the situation. We were forcing Saké to come for treatments; if anything serious happened to him it would be on us, not on the boar nor on the Madik 'medicine,' that the blame would be laid. We were strangers in a strange land. If our first move were ostensibly the murder of the chief, our lives were probably safe — there was the government — but our work was certainly doomed.

Besides, though Saké submitted like a stoic to probings and excavations, he had his own Penelope-like system for keeping matters in control. Neatly encased in fresh white

bandages he would leave us in the late afternoon. The next day he would reappear with a loose and stringy mass of black gauze cast like a fish net over his arm. Once Freddy had clipped off this unprepossessing heap he would find a little extra mud in the wounds. It was obvious that Saké sought to cull the best from two worlds. He submitted dutifully to Freddy's treatment every day; every evening, to make assurance doubly sure, he removed the bandages and applied some of his own medicine. The bandages, having spent a maculate night on the floor, would be hastily wrapped on again before his next medical appointment.

In spite of their passion for cloth, none of the natives liked bandages. One day Saké arrived without any at all.

'Where are they?' Freddy asked severely. 'How many times have I told you you must keep those bandages on?'

Saké looked aggrieved and innocent.

'How could I?' he asked plaintively. 'In the night a rat ate them.'

This explanation was considered so brilliant by the assembled onlookers that it became the standard excuse for all cases of missing bandages.

By some miracle either of mud or chlorazene, Saké's arm finally healed. He graciously gave all the public credit to Freddy, though we suspected that he crossed his fingers when he did it. We knew what he had been doing, and he knew that we knew, but by a gentleman's agreement the subject was never mentioned.

Freddy and I knew equally much — or equally little — about medicine. I suspect, however, that Freddy secretly considered his knowledge rather superior to mine, just as I privately felt my opinions and diagnoses to be based on much sounder precepts than his. But we were well aware that lengthy wrangles and discussions on the conditions of



our patients would scarcely inspire them with the confidence which was our chief ally, so whichever one got there first was officially considered in charge of the case. A more or less general rule was that men were Freddy's prerogative, women and children mine.

When we got sick ourselves this situation had, naturally, to be reversed, but neither of us was a very good patient to the other, each thinking that if ever you had a right to practise your own theories, it was on yourself. Luckily, like Martin and Evart, we had our attacks of malaria alternately and in the throes of one of these we were both as docile as lambs, though our spirits were not quite as broken as Evart's. At the height of the fever he would lie in bed sobbing pitifully that he was going to die in the awful jungle. On these occasions Martin always came to get us. He was willing to nurse Evart, but refused to break his rule of not speaking to him, and stood contemptuously by while one of us put cold compresses on Evart's head and assured him that in a few days he would be all right again.

I knew why Evart thought he was going to die, but couldn't understand why he minded the prospect. In the middle of subtertian malaria you feel, like a person seasick in his bunk, that death could only be a change for the better. The recuperative stage after one of these five-day attacks was a dreary business. Wobbling out onto the veranda, streaming with cold perspiration from the effort of walking, you sat down to a platter of fried corned beef and rice. You reached out a shaking hand towards it when suddenly your quivering stomach flopped inside you like a hooked fish and with a gulp you tottered back to the bedroom to lie down, visions of coddled eggs, creamed chicken, and calves'-foot jelly swimming before your eyes.

Malaria, we had been told, always concentrated its dis-

comfort in a person's weakest point. With this theory I used smugly to agree, for Freddy was subject to blinding headaches with it, whereas I only suffered a more generalized misery in less derogatory portions of my anatomy.

Whenever one of us was sick the natives would tiptoe up onto the veranda and peep anxiously through the bedroom window. Whether this showed an affectionate interest in the state of our respective healths, or a hopeful ethnological curiosity as to what our burial rites might be, we were never certain. It was a pleasant distraction to roll over and see the silhouette of waving bird of paradise plumes in the square of light.

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Medical problems, for all the worry involved, were nevertheless an interesting challenge to our resourcefulness and a liberal education in simple remedies. We developed another function, however, which had nothing at all to recommend it.

The store, or 'Toko,' as it was universally called, had been no idea of ours; in fact it blossomed relentlessly into one of our greatest afflictions. It caused us endless trouble and, because we were vague about prices and conscientious towards our customers, our books were always in the red.

In the time-honoured tradition of jungle travel, we had brought with us from Sorong a number of articles supposed to be irresistible to the natives. The Netherland East Indian guilder meant nothing at all to the inland peoples, either as a means of exchange or as an object of intrinsic beauty. For fishhooks and yellow beads, little knives and big ones, we acquired bunches of bananas and ears of corn for our nourishment, feathered headdresses and bows and arrows for our collection. There was at first a good deal of

mutual confusion as to relative values, but finally we established an arbitrary price list for the most common commodities and purchases progressed more smoothly. This might be termed the Period of Normal Trade.

Even then there were occasional difficulties. There was, for instance, the Lombok crisis. Lombok is a little wild red pepper which grows in profusion in the jungle. It is an excellent condiment used in extreme moderation, for a single half-inch pepper is enough to take the skin off your mouth, palate, and esophagus while anguished tears stream down your face. Consequently a generous handful would stock any kitchen adequately for six months. This first handful we were pleased to receive and gave two fishhooks for it.

The natives thought they had discovered an infallible get-rich-quick system. Half an hour with a Lombok bush and the world's goods were theirs. They commenced a methodical stripping of the jungle, and bushel baskets, kakoyas, and leaf packages full of peppers were brought to our door. When we said, 'We don't want them. Take them away,' the peddler would smile knowingly and settle down to bargain. We had bought them once and this sort of bluff was no use, his expression said. In desperation we called in Saké.

'Saké,' we said in Malay, 'your people will not believe us. We do *not* want any more Lombok. Will you please tell them so?'

Saké nodded comprehension and went off to harangue the village. Unfortunately at this time we were fresh in Sainke Doek and were still untutored in many things. One of these was an unusual idiosyncrasy of Saké's speech. In Malay 'tida' means 'no,' 'not,' or any other form of negative you choose to imply. Saké either, like Humpty Dumpty, felt that words should adapt themselves to his meaning, or had

an uncontrollable impulse to use the word 'tida.' Whatever the reason, he included it in every sentence, irrespective of significance. If he said: 'I am not sick today,' it was a fifty-fifty chance as to whether he had a raging temperature or wished to indicate that his health was uncommonly good. Since he employed this conversational device himself, he apparently saw no reason why anyone else should do otherwise.

When once we had caught on to this verbal quirk we learned by complicated systems of circumlocution to separate the negative from the positive in his statements. But at the time of the Lombok epidemic we were still under the illusion that Saké's Malay, being as crude as ours, probably resembled it in other respects. We were, therefore, more than dismayed when we noticed that whereas the former bulk of red peppers brought daily to us could have been roughly estimated in pounds, they now seemed to come in by the ton. We protested, we argued, we stamped and swore. The Lombok-bearers would sit down stolidly, spilling their ware about, and say firmly:

'Saké told us you wanted more.'

\* \* \* \*

In the halcyon beginning most people were delighted with anything we chose to give them, for it was all exciting and new. But they quickly adopted the more natural attitude of trying to get as much as possible for their wares. One day Emdur came to call. She accepted a cigarette and sat for a while conversing aimlessly. Presently she pulled her carrying-basket to her and fished out three wild lemons. We were never enthusiastic about wild lemons, especially as the natives picked them when they were the size of grapefruit, thick-skinned, dry, and pulpy. However, to be polite, I ad-

mired Emdur's and offered her a needle for the trio. Solemnly she accepted the needle and handed me the lemons. She smoked another cigarette and talked for a while to Yacob. Then, reaching into her basket, she produced three more lemons.

'I should like a needle for these,' she said.

I looked at her suspiciously, but her expression was without guile. My curiosity was sufficiently aroused to give her another needle and call to Freddy to come and witness this demonstration of salesmanship. We were not surprised when a few minutes later Emdur extracted three more lemons and looked suggestively at my sewing bag.

Here we decided to draw the line.

'Now, Emdur,' I said, 'we only wanted three lemons in the first place. We positively will not buy more than six.'

Emdur looked at us, grinned, and shrugged.

'Oh, well, take the rest,' she said airily, and as she stood up she rolled twenty-four more lemons from her basket onto the floor.

As we watched her strolling nonchalantly back towards the village we were sure she was saying to herself:

'I was afraid it wouldn't work.'

\* \* \* \*

It was about this time that the Period of Normal Trade began to decline, dimmed by the ascendant Toko star. Part of it was our fault. Whenever we moved it was in the company of fifty to a hundred carriers, one for each separate featherweight object. If we had brought along enough trade goods to compensate each carrier in kind we should have needed many more men to carry the extra things, and therefore so many more things to pay off the extra men. To avoid this vicious circle we descended to the customary expedient

of recompensing them in hard cash, twenty-five Netherland East Indian cents a day. These sums of money were always accepted with a good grace. If we chose to give away small round pieces of metal, that was our privilege. Besides, it had been explained to them that it might be useful in paying their yearly taxes rather than working them off. They had, of course, no idea of the value of the different coins. Any man would gladly have exchanged a silver quarter for two copper pennies.

For their own protection we attempted to teach the Madik how to appraise their wealth. They thoroughly enjoyed anything to do with arithmetic, for they loved to count, and I equally enjoyed the surprising discovery that anyone could be my arithmetical inferior. Their numerical system was vigesimal, for their toes were more available than ours. Five was indicated by curling up all the fingers of one hand, but fifteen, for instance, entailed the mildly acrobatic effort of clutching the toes of one foot with both hands. I think the decimal system must have evolved with the first pair of shoes.

Thus far finance was only a game in which money furnished the counters. But one day a Moi native, more sophisticated than the inland people, came up from the coast. He had a quarter and he needed a knife. We had knives, so would we please sell him one?

The idea of selling our goods imported under such difficulties did not appeal to us in any way. We also had a use for the knives, which were hard to duplicate, and none for the quarter. Finally, however, we decided it was boorish to refuse him and that in this one case we would make an exception; the poor man had no other means of ever acquiring a knife. Unfortunately during this transaction our veranda was, as usual, crowded. An entirely new idea burst like a

bomb among the onlookers. With these ridiculous coins, these groups of copper pennies and shiny white pieces that they had been desultorily stowing away, they could satisfy their hearts' desires.

Every Madik who had ever received money from us came rushing to the house during the next few days, clamouring to exchange it for red cloth, for mirrors, for harmonicas. One man would produce two pennies and say he wanted a steel axe. The next would offer a two and a half guilder piece for a handful of beads. Our most assiduous customer was Sevansarik. In profile he strongly resembled a Jew-fish, and perhaps to counteract his lack of physical grace he attached to the end of each of his pigtails the carcass of an iridescent blue-green beetle. Every time he turned his head they flashed in the sun like a tiara of aquamarines. We called him 'Death Valley Scotty,' for he must have tapped a mysterious and endless source of wealth. After secret excursions he would return every two or three days and seat himself comfortably on our floor, looking as though he had literally half-swallowed a canary. One cheek or both would be bulging ominously, a perfect circle outlined against the skin. He would maintain a pregnant silence until we addressed him.

'Slamat, Sevansarik,' Freddy or I would say wearily. 'What can we do for you?'

Sevansarik would grin awkwardly, open his mouth, cough loudly, and regurgitate a guilder.

After wiping it off on his breech-clout, he would hold it out towards us.

'My money,' he would croon. 'I want to spend it.'

Had we really been interested Toko-keepers, we should have congratulated ourselves unreservedly on Sevansarik. His prime impulse was, as he said, to spend his money, car-

ing very little what he got for it. Our most damaged and unpopular wares were sure of a welcome reception in his little pandanus-leaf handbag. Although Sevansarik was not handsome, his bride was less so, owing to the flaky skin disease which made so many of our neighbours look as though, like snakes, they were shedding their epidermis. We strongly suspected that not to Shulno went the bulk of Sevansarik's loot, for at dances and singing parties on rainy nights it is customary to exchange presents with your partner of the evening. Madik women are not to be bought any more or any less than are most others, but it is only natural that an attractive and unusual gift might do something towards inducing in them a receptive frame of mind.

As time went on worse was to follow in our Toko. News of our treasures trickled into the Moraid territory. Rich with pennies from Mr. van der Goot's recent patrol through there, the Moraid descended on us in a horde. Far less tractable than the Madik, dozens of armed and haughty warriors would crowd onto our veranda, urgently jingling their wealth. We certainly had not brought our valuables to Sainke Doek to dispose of them all in one day for Moraid pennies. On the other hand, the prospect of offending these insistent and overbearing new customers was not a tempting one. We decided on a feeble attempt at diplomacy.

'We haven't enough things,' we said, 'to exchange for so much money. We will allow each man to spend five cents.'

It took endless time and trouble to attend to all these purchases. Each man trustingly handed us his entire fortune and told us what he wanted. Where we made a serious error was in returning any change. We should simultaneously have made a modest profit and obtained peace at everyone else's price; it was unimaginative not to realize that no Moraid would remain quiescent with money burning



in his mouth or his armband. This time it was they who attempted a roundabout manoeuvre which it took us some time to detect. The Moraid remained in town but left us strictly alone, apparently resigned to the possession of specie. Their Madik hosts, on the other hand, began suddenly to throw money around, for we had continued a little *sub rosa* trade with the Madik, not wishing to alienate our neighbours. Our suspicions were not aroused until one day Skolabé turned up with twenty cents and said he wanted a knife.

‘You already have one, Skolabé, that we gave you. What do you want with another?’ we asked.

‘I don’t want it,’ said Skolabé in surprise. ‘A Moraid man gave me this money and told me to say I wanted to buy a knife.’

After deep cogitation we finally made a public announcement that the Toko was empty. There would be nothing in it until the next importation from Sorong a month hence. This inspiration was doubly effective. It not only brought us a respite from our customers but when the next prahu-load of supplies landed in Mega the natives, instead of casually disappearing into the jungle, came clamouring from miles around for the privilege of carrying them up to us.

\* \* \* \*

Our relations with the Madik were not all on a professional or business basis. There was the very important duty of keeping them entertained. Part of this we could discharge simply by being our own sweet selves. Like the Ubangi at the World’s Fair or the hartebeest in the zoo, we drew a crowd of interested spectators just by existing. The inhabitants of Sainke Doek brought all their visiting friends to stare at us. We slipped effortlessly into the rôle of

museum pieces examined in a respectful hush. The Madik have beautiful manners, and the tours were conducted with the utmost decorum. No one was allowed to handle the exhibits or annoy the animals. If any intruder presumed to touch one of our possessions, he was severely reprimanded. Visitors might peer from a decent distance at Freddy as he cleaned his gun, but leaning over his shoulder and breathing heavily down his neck was tabu. The most popular exhibit was a small model schooner which Freddy carved in his spare moments. We used to listen to Skolabé explaining it to his friends.

'You see,' he would say with pride, 'the Tuan makes it small now so it will be easy to carry, but when they get to the beach he will make it big and they will sail home on it.'

Another voluble lecture was always delivered on the antlers. The Ambonese hold antlers in high esteem, bringing them along from Ceram, and I had been considerably discommoded when Martin gave me a pair on my birthday in Sorong, for, as long as Martin was with us, so must the antlers be. An artist had imbedded them in a painstakingly carved replica of the original deer's head and on it had painted a sneering mouth and a pair of narrow, malevolent eyes quite unlike the gentle visual organs generally associated with the species. In New Guinea there are not only no deer but nothing remotely resembling them, and the amazing monster with sticks on its head became famous all through the mountains.

If we were feeling agreeable we wound up our tired old phonograph for our guests. At the first wheeze the uninitiated took to their heels, to the hilarious amusement of the habitués. Once lured back by the assurance that it was quite safe, they would sit tensely forward shaking their heads and clucking in amazement. In all the inland region

there was no sort of musical instrument, not even a Jew's-harp or a drum. For this reason all orchestral noises were so strange to them that they made no effort to understand what could have produced them, but when it came to human voices, they felt there must be some logical explanation. An invariable request sooner or later was:

‘Please open the box so we can see the people.’

The only satisfactory excuse for not complying with this wish was that if we opened the box the little people would escape and there would be no more music.

Sometimes we entertained our callers by showing them copies of old magazines (they were always old by the time they reached us). The pictures fascinated them, right side up, sideways, or upside down. A photograph of a declaiming politician would make the women run away, screaming in half-pretended fright, and the Dionne quintuplets shocked them profoundly. Papuan twins are immediately destroyed or they would grow up into witches, and the idea of deliberately preserving five witches in one family seemed to them absurd. But most of all they liked the advertisements. One day I asked Basi, who had been earnestly perusing a magazine from cover to cover, which picture he liked the best.

‘There is one that is most beautiful,’ he said, his face lighting up. Turning the pages with great deliberation, he finally found it. It was a picture of an inner-spring mattress.

Since their appreciation of art appeared so highly developed, we decided to try out their creative abilities. We had a large supply of crayons and we handed these around with pieces of paper. At first we had to draw designs for them to copy. Freddy evolved a stereotyped parrot which I admired as much as the natives, so infinitely superior was it, both artistically and anatomically, to anything I could put on paper. As so often seems to be the case with gifted persons,

Freddy was not only blasé about his accomplishment but rather bored with the whole drawing class, and it sometimes took many minutes of persuasion before we could wheedle him into producing a fresh version of his masterpiece for our enjoyment and instruction.

It was at moments like these and others in which I played with the children, did cat's cradle with their elders, or fished with the little boys that I realized how perilous it would have been for me to be in New Guinea alone. It would have been dangerously easy for me to slip imperceptibly into a permanent condition of second childhood, completely absorbed in these simple games, and the problems of these simple people, satisfied with magic and witchcraft as explanations of inexplicable happenings and with a nudge in the ribs and a guffaw as intellectual stimulus. I'm afraid if it had been left up to me, civilization would never have progressed very far.

One day, shortly after an attack of malaria, I was feeling very peevish and had my only relapse. We had been measuring all the morning and I was trying to check over the measurements after lunch. It was hot, I was tired and sleepy and in a great hurry to get through and crawl into bed. It is sheer physical anguish to try to use your brain in the heat and glare and biting insects of an early New Guinea afternoon. Swarms of natives kept appearing on the veranda, clamouring to buy something or sell something or draw something or play the Victrola.

'Damn these people,' I wailed to Freddy, almost in tears of exasperation. 'Can't they ever leave us alone? They drive me crazy. How do we stand it here?'

In the cool depths of the dark bedroom I could hear Freddy laughing.

'I didn't think you'd ever get tired of your little friends,'

he shouted back. 'Why, you don't sound like yourself — you sound like me. I'm glad to see you haven't quite gone native yet.'

I snarled at the old woman and two boys at my elbow, snarled again at Freddy, threw down my papers, and stalked angrily to my mosquito net.

For all their hastily developed shrewdness at bargaining, the Madik never accepted anything without some sort of return. They believe that one person must not always be giving and another receiving; it is only by mutual independence and graciousness that men and women can keep each other's respect. So, although they were not averse to getting what they could out of us in business transactions, socially they were more than punctilious about keeping an even balance.

We amassed piles of grubby ornaments and rolls of dreary-looking sago in return for anything that we gave away. It was reassuring to feel that the Madik considered us their equals — queer, of course, and different, but fundamentally on the same plane. They venerated us for certain things — mostly our imported equipment and the knowledge of how to use it. But they knew quite well that there were many ways in which their jungle wisdom was superior to ours, many cases in which they were the teachers and we the pupils. As we felt responsible for tending them when they were ill and feeding them when they were hungry, so they felt responsible for protecting us against the dangers of their land.

After we had been in Sainke Doek for two months, Freddy had to take a trip to Sorong to send some cables and replenish our supplies, while I elected to stay where I was. Shortly after he had marched off to the rhythmic clank of kerosene tins on the carriers' backs, a large crowd ap-

proached the house. Carrying their spears and bows and arrows, decked with feathers and nosepieces, they filed onto our veranda. They were a perfect imitation of a head-hunting party out for trophies, the sort of picture which, in a travel book or movie, indicates the author's most narrow escape from a hideous death. In spite of my confidence in their friendliness, it gave me quite a start.

'We have come to protect you while the Tuan is away,' said Saké. 'There are bad tribes to the south whom we do not trust. They have eaten our fathers and our grandfathers. Every night some of us will sleep here to make you safe.'

I thanked them solemnly and told them it really was not necessary; I was not afraid. But every morning when I wakened I found four or five black forms, weapons by their sides, stretched out on the floor.

Ordinarily, as I have said, our evenings were strictly non-Papuan, but in Freddy's absence I was left to the darkness and my own devices. The Madik realized perfectly that Freddy was the disciplinarian of the family and that I was putty in their hands. My supper often stretched out to snacks for seven or eight, though by tacit understanding these were only doled out when Martin had left the veranda; I should never have had the courage to do it before his coldly disapproving eye. After this rather unsatisfactory repast we had music. We always opened with the 'Hungarian Rhapsody,' for that was everyone's favourite. This was due less to any inherent quality in the music than to the fact that Freddy had advertised it as a tone poem describing the culminating vehemence of a thunderstorm which was gradually dissipated by the appearance of the sun.

'Now,' someone would cry excitedly, 'there comes the big rain. Hear the thunder!'

They never tired of analyzing these stormy sounds and interpreting them to one another. One evening I tried to initiate them into the intricacies of a Viennese waltz. Barefoot black bodies twirled around the creaking veranda gasping for breath, very serious and earnest about their footwork.

‘I’m glad Freddy can’t see me now,’ I thought as I revolved rapidly with one of the small boys. Thoroughly exercised and exhausted, I finally retired to bed and my self-appointed bodyguard stretched out on the veranda floor, imploring me to see that Rebo stayed in the bedroom. When Freddy came back the whole village crowded around him to tell him proudly how well they had looked after me in his absence — as indeed they had.

# Eighteen

## The worthy Ambonese

HAD THE POPULATION of Sainke Doek been exclusively Papuan our lives there would have been idyllic; there would have been nothing but the insect life ever to provoke us. To live in a community so congenial that the impulse to physical or verbal violence never assails you is perhaps an impossible experience, and even Sainke Doek proffered its human irritant, though only, we were pleased to discover, in infrequent doses. Invariably it took the form of an Ambonese. Freddy and I did not care for the Ambonese.

I used to ponder on the reason for their creation. Like so many members of the insect kingdom, they seem to have been placed in the world only to annoy. The Ambonese are predominantly Malay, with a probable dash of Portuguese and an admixture of negroid blood from the Ceram mountaineers which often causes a combination of frizzly hair with square, high-cheekboned faces. Most of them now speak Malay, their own version of that elastic language which is, we discovered to our dismay, quite different from what you find in the textbooks.

The fact that Amboina has long been Christianized gives its natives a feeling of superiority over other inhabitants of the Moluccas, who are largely Mohammedan and have been tractable subjects for a far shorter time. It also qualifies them, in their estimation, for assisting in imposing the



benefits of government and religion on less enlightened peoples; and who could fit into this category more convincingly than the poor Papuans? For this reason, and because Amboina itself is overpopulated, there are a number of Ambonese in New Guinea.

One of our Dutch friends told us that everyone who came to New Guinea was supposed to go through three stages of feeling about the Ambonese.

'When you first arrive,' he said, 'you are full of unqualified admiration for them. Are they not the only natives of the East Indies brave enough to become native magistrates, to live among Papuan cannibals, to penetrate wherever they are ordered? They make our most loyal soldiery. And so polite and willing! But if you see a little more of them, you discover that they are fawning, sulky, cruel, hypocritical bullies and you begin to detest them.'

'And the third stage?' we asked.

'The third stage,' he said ruminatively, 'is reached when you see their good points and bad points in proper perspective and like them again, though with less enthusiasm. I have been here now for four years and I wonder, shall I ever reach that third stage?'

Our development also was arrested at the second stage. Having started out quite passive on the Ambonese question, we became worked up to an actual paroxysm of dislike.

We tried to make an exception for Martin, our pearl without price, who was certainly the best thing that ever came out of Amboina. 'Of course, Martin is different,' we would say — on his good days — 'but that's because he has so much good black Alfuro blood in him.' (Martin was very dark indeed and his hair was kinky.)

Not only Martin, Sapeholo, and the Guru were Ambonese, but also the police 'corporal,' and the bird-hunter

working for the museum under Freddy's direction. Towards the end of July, by some ill chance all the Ambonese congregated simultaneously. The twentieth of July is Freddy's birthday. Racking my brain to devise some method of celebration, I suddenly remembered our jar of mincemeat. I had never made a mince pie and Martin had never heard of one, but I told him of the impending occasion; we held many whispered consultations on the subject and finally evolved a recipe.

To this day I don't know whether piecrust requires an egg, but it seemed to us to be an important element, so by underground telegraph we let it be known that if anyone could bring us a cassowary egg, it would fetch a staggering price. Cassowary eggs are even larger than those the ostrich produces, and extremely useful. You break a hole in the top and pour off as much as you need at a time. One egg would provide us with two days at least of omelettes, pancakes, and other delicacies.

So absorbed was I in the pie problem that I was almost impervious to the gathering of the Ambonese. The morning of the twentieth dawned much as any other day. We rolled out of bed and staggered sleepily onto the veranda for our six-o'clock toast and coffee. To our astonishment the table was garnished with tin cans stuffed with tight little bunches of flowers. On the back of Freddy's chair sat a blue-and-red lory. When he attempted to move the bird in order to sit down it bit him severely. Just as Freddy started to indicate what he thought of such goings-on, we perceived Ambonese heads peeping around the corner to witness his pleased surprise. Freddy swallowed his words, wrapped his injured finger in his paper napkin to stop the flow of blood, and sat down in an eloquent silence.

No sooner had we finished eating than our attention was

drawn to a most unwelcome sight. Up the path to our house progressed Sapeholo, not, as ordinarily, barefoot in a pair of striped pajamas, but resplendent in dazzling white uniform, topee and white boots included, a yellow necktie carefully knotted under his double brown chin. Behind him trailed his police. This solemn procession climbed in silence onto our veranda. Sapeholo, doffing his helmet, grasped Freddy's hand and pumped it up and down. Then, still retaining a firm grip on it, he burst into a flow of high Malay on the honour conferred upon Sainke Doek, upon New Guinea, and obliquely upon Ambon, by the Tuan's condescending to have his birthday in their midst. This speech ended, like all Ambonese oratory, with a flood of tears. Sapeholo let go of Freddy's perspiring palm, wiped his eyes, blew his nose, and continued to Part Two.

'I should like,' he said, clearing his throat resoundingly, 'to have some remembrance of so great a day. So I have decided that the Tuan may photograph me in my uniform. With that picture in my possession, the Tuan's birthday will remain forever green in my memory.'

'Really, the old monkey,' said Freddy angrily to me in English, 'that's why he's all dressed up. I won't take his picture. My camera isn't loaded, and anyway, his face would break it.'

Freddy had once before been manoeuvred into taking Sapeholo's picture, but Sapeholo had objected to the result because he said it made his hair look too long.

'Remember, dear, it's your birthday and you have to be good,' I said soothingly. 'Besides, if you don't take his picture we'll never get rid of him.'

The second part of my argument impressed Freddy. With very bad grace he crawled into his changing-bag and struggled with his plates.

'If I have to take his picture I'll do it up brown and take the whole caboodle,' he said, aware that we could never leave Sainke Doek without having once immortalized in celluloid its Ambonese population. Perhaps we like pictures of ourselves as well as they do and are only less naïve about it.

Once the camera was loaded, Freddy told everyone to line up for a group picture. Sapeholo leapt to his feet in consternation.

'You are not to take everyone else in the picture with me!' he shouted. 'It shall be a picture of myself alone — I myself standing quite alone.'

'Good God!' said Freddy, torn between irritation and amusement. 'All right, I take you alone first, and then I'll take everyone together.'

In what might be loosely termed our front yard we had one large bush of yellow flowers, the only spot of colour against the surrounding rampart of green. Before we could open our mouths to protest, this entire bush had been, by Sapeholo's orders, uprooted and placed in a favourable position as background for his stiffly articulated figure. The bush fared no better at the hands of the police when their turn came, for each policeman plucked from it a large bouquet of blossoms which he held pressed to his grinning countenance.

'Do you suppose, Freddy, that that's why they call them nosegays?' I asked, much pleased with the thought, but Freddy only disappeared under his black hood.

'A fine morning this has turned out to be,' he grumbled once we had got rid of the swarm. 'Why in hell did you have to tell them all it was my birthday?'

'I only talked to Martin,' I said meekly. 'He must have passed the word around. However, it's all over now.'

But there I was mistaken. From Sorong we had brought with us one bottle of cheap red wine and decided that no more fitting occasion for a celebration would ever present itself. Red wine and mince pie! A feast, it seemed to us, for Rajahs. As we started on the bread and jam which was the *pièce de résistance* of our evening meals, Martin addressed us rather sheepishly.

‘The Bestuer Assistent’ (that was Sapeholo) ‘would like to know if the Tuan would care to hear some Ambonese songs tonight. He would like to gather the Ambonese and sing to him.’

What could we say? Not that we had a previous engagement. Not that we had planned to go to the movies. Smiling bravely, we said it would be delightful.

‘How utterly horrible!’ I moaned. ‘What *will* we do with them? You know how they never talk when they call. We’ll have to monologue all evening.’

‘If Ambonese songs are anything like the Ambonese . . .’ said Freddy grimly.

Finally we began to feel that our attitude was more than ungracious. It was, after all, a very kind intention to give a birthday serenade. So, with a sudden burst of generosity, we decided to share our mince pie and our bottle of wine with the coming troubadours.

We were in quite a state of before-the-party nerves when finally the lamps of the visitors shoved yellow fingers through the blackness of the night. Frightened of the cold pall of silence that might at any moment engulf us, we started chattering feverishly and ungrammatically in Malay.

‘So nice of you to come. I never dreamt that Martin had a singing voice — it’s too bad we have no guitar for accompaniment. Will you do an Ambonese dance for us as well?’

The silent group shuffled up. Some had carried chairs, and they all sat down stiffly and uncompromisingly around the table. So far not one of them had uttered a word.

'Now,' said Freddy frantically, 'since you are so kindly going to sing for us we should like to give you a little inspiration. We will open this bottle of wine to celebrate the occasion.'

Sapeholo rose and lifted his right hand. 'If the Tuan pleases we will sing first. The wine may come afterwards.'

We were abashed and rather annoyed. Whose party was it anyway?

'Since we are all Christians here together, I will now begin to pray,' said Sapeholo. And pray he did, a full twenty minutes of it for the health and the immortal soul of Tuan Crockett.

The prayer once concluded, there were rustling sounds and from every pocket, every policeman's tunic, a hymn-book emerged.

Sapeholo put on a pair of dark glasses as a gesture of formality and opened his hymnal.

'We will sing first number 75,' he said. 'Listen carefully to me. I will read each line aloud first. You will sing it and I will read the next line.'

'Bri hari ini, ja Toehan, penoeh Kesoekaan,' he intoned.

'Bri hari ini, ja Toehan, penoeh Kesoekaan,' the choir returned.

'Dan banyak kali kembali sebeloem perhinggaan,' and the cacophonous echo: 'Dan banyak kali kembali sebeloem perhinggaan.'

'Perhaps if they could sing two lines together they could get in the swing and not be so distressingly out of key,' I thought, 'but that is something that can never be proved.'

Freddy and I with heroic concentration kept our eyes front while three hymns rasped through by this ponderous method. Then there was a slight and gratifying pause.

‘Three hymns, as you know,’ said Sapeholo, clearing his throat, ‘are obligatory on all birthdays. Since, however, we hold the Tuan in such high esteem, we will on this occasion sing a fourth one.’

After the concluding prayer, which was even longer than the initial one, a formal presentation was made to Freddy of three sheets of paper, closely covered with painstaking calligraphy.

‘Thank you so much,’ said Freddy politely. ‘What is it? Shall I read it?’

‘It is not necessary for the Tuan to read them now. They are doubtless still fresh in his mind. Those are the words of the hymns we have just sung for him.’

Freddy was very annoyed that my birthday was safely behind me. However, I would gladly have declared an Ambonese holiday to have had my next one in Sainke Doek.

\* \* \* \*

One day Sapeholo borrowed Freddy’s shotgun. He had one of his own, but it was a poor gun and didn’t shoot many birds. Guns handled by Ambonese are apt to develop this idiosyncrasy. While he was out we heard two shots, so that on his return we decided it would not be too embarrassing to enquire about his luck.

‘The gun is good,’ he said, ‘and my aim was perfect. But the wind was in the wrong direction. It blew the shot away from the bird.’

Although for the most part the Ambonese never harmed hide nor feather of wild game on their hunting expeditions, the Guru once came very close to a telling shot. Wandering

through the jungle in search of meat he saw something moving in the distance.

'Ah, a cassowary,' he whispered to his companion, and, hastily putting the gun to his shoulder, he took aim and fired. Emdur, who had been out gathering lansa fruits in her carrying-basket, heard the shot whistling past her ear, stood trembling for a moment, and then ran for home as fast as her sobbing breath would permit, spurred by the sound of the Guru crashing after her.

\* \* \* \*

One of the many tiresome things about the Ambonese is their health, which seems to be universally poor. It is fatal to ask an Ambonese how he is, for he will always tell you. They seem to feel that they have a monopoly on all the aches and pains in the world, and rejoice in describing them explicitly and with a loving attention to detail, reaching an inevitable climax where they announce dramatically that their urine is the colour of old tea. Next best to their symptoms they take pleasure in the treatments for them; medicines and pills, ointments and bandages enchant them, and the idea of an inoculation transports them with delight.

Sapeholo and the Guru were always pestering us with their complaints and pointedly caressing our bottles of pills. The Guru had dysentery and, failing the prescribed opiate, I gave him one evening a shot of morphine to quiet his stomach and his wails. The needle was dull and his skin was tough, but for once I stabbed away happily and without remorse. From then on he and Sapeholo plead regularly for an 'injexi.' They were not certain exactly why it had been given, and every week invented a new disease that they hoped might require a hypodermic. It was to them the stamp of social success, the very acme of distinction.



One day the Guru from the neighbouring village of Swailbe, a day's walk away, came to visit the Guru of Sainke Doek. The latter, with his wife, three children, and innumerable chickens, was living with Sapeholo in an overcrowded little house about a quarter of a mile away from us. When the Swailbe Guru with his wife and three children was also sandwiched in, the place was a shambles.

The evening after the visitors arrived one of the Guru wives came panting to our house saying the imported Guru had a terrible pain in his stomach and could we lend assistance. With visions of appendicitis, cancer, and ptomaine dancing before our eyes, we gathered up a handful of medicines and a thermometer and rushed down.

From afar we received indications of the Guru's condition, for he was screaming at brief and regular intervals, 'Ayo, Ayo, Ayo!' the established cry of an Ambonese in pain. Attracted by this clamour, a crowd of natives had gathered outside the house, optimistically expectant of an imminent death. We were ushered into the sickroom, and, once our eyes had grown accustomed to the flickering illumination, discovered to our astonishment that it was bulging with people. All the police, our Martin, and all the Guru wives and children stood closely packed together like commuters in a subway rush. On Sapeholo's bed the invalid lay writhing while Sapeholo massaged his abdomen.

'Ayo, ayo, ayo!' shouted the Guru to his silent and respectful audience. He was in no mood to desist long enough to answer our questions, so Sapeholo volubly explained his symptoms.

Now the Ambonese, for all their pious upbringing, have no verbal reticence about their bodily functions. One of their favourite topics of conversation is their bowels, a movement of which they term 'buang ayer.' It appeared

that the Guru was unable to 'buang ayer.' In fact, for several days this condition had persisted.

'Castor oil,' we said promptly, hoping it wasn't appendicitis.

Castor oil was debated for a while. It appeared that the Guru had once taken castor oil and found it unappetizing. His attitude turned out to be, on the subject of castor oil, adamant.

We fished among our medicines and produced a bottle of cascara pills.

'This,' we said in an attempt at Sapeholo's best style, 'has the same beneficent properties as castor oil with none of its disagreeable drawbacks. It can be swallowed easily, tastelessly, and painlessly. It is, in fact, a very wonderful medicine.'

Sapeholo took a cascara pill and examined it with interest. Then, holding it between thumb and forefinger, he approached the police corporal.

'This medicine, the Tuan and Nunya say,' he orated, 'has the same beneficent properties as castor oil with none of its disagreeable drawbacks. It can be swallowed easily, tastelessly, and painlessly. It is, in fact, a very wonderful medicine. What is your opinion? Should the Guru take or not take this pill?'

The corporal fondled the pill for a while and thought it all over carefully. Finally he drew himself to attention, saluted, and remarked that if the Guru cared to take the pill, the action had his entire approval.

Sapeholo continued this little drama with every individual in the room, excluding only the very youngest of the children. Eventually it was unanimously agreed that a dose of one cascara pill — no more, though I plead for two — should be ingested by the Guru.

At that moment the Guru spoke.

'I wish to "buang ayer,"' he said.

'Ay, ay, ay, he wishes to "buang ayer"!' everyone acclaimed.

As Sapeholo rushed for a little pot Freddy and I considered it only fitting to withdraw. We were, however, the only ones to do so. We went out and sat uneasily on the veranda, discussing the case with as much solemnity as we could muster. Every few moments a messenger rushed out to us from the sickroom bearing the latest bulletin on progress there. Finally the glad tidings of success were shouted through the house. Everyone came out and shook hands with us and with each other. Then we methodically gathered up our kit and walked home through the night.

# Nineteen

## The rain forest

IN THE CLEARING where we lived the sun was fierce and bright. It was easy to imagine oneself a second Atlas, carrying on head and shoulders the hot weight of a heavy, flaming globe. Around our clearing in an impenetrable wall of green the jungle rose. New Guinea trees conserve their strength for growing upwards. Until they have pierced the sky they put out no horizontal branches, and never did I dream that trees could be so straight and tall. But though the branches only mingle high above the ground, the trees are still closely linked together, woven into a whole. Between soaring pillars of white, enormous symmetrical iron-wood trunks and the towering Waringens the heavy rope-like lianas twine back and forth like the string spiderweb at a children's party. Pale tree-trunks gleam here and there through the thick mass of leaves, big leaves and little leaves, leaves of trees and leaves of vines and lianas dripping from them, so intermingled they might be the convention of a hundred species on a single stem. Orchids and fern-like parasites and plants that look like open fans nest on the massive standing trunks and on the stumps of toppled giants.

The step from our clearing into the jungle was like diving under water from a dazzling beach; instantly the entire consistency of our environment was changed. Above us the damp jungle, twining its long green fingers together,

shut out the sun. The song of crickets, the whirl of a thousand tiny wings, all ceased, and for a time it seemed as though we had entered a world empty of sound save for the rattle of some enormous leaf as we passed. The soft-footed creatures of the jungle, like the Papuan who stalks them, can stir in breathless silence if they suspect an alien presence.

It is difficult for the uninitiated eye to see the jungle birds and beasts. Most of them are either too high up, too well camouflaged, or too swift. Besides, unless you stand stock still, you dare not raise your eyes from the treacherous ground. In the green dimness the only spots of colour are the butterflies that sail unconcernedly by, brilliant blue and polka-dotted green, or the red and yellow blossoms that drift below from the unseen tree-tops where the sun still shines.

The trees give an effect of being hydroponically begotten, for rarely do they rise from solid ground. Most of the jungle floor is liquid in consistency, whether it be actually swampy water or gelatinous black mud. Crisscross arteries of mischievous ground roots chase and tangle with each other like eels in the Sargasso Sea. Some of the more monstrous ones weirdly transform themselves from low fences into high flanged buttresses merging into the trunk at quite a height, making the tree look like some web-footed giant standing in the mud.

At our level, which is very low when marked on the mighty vegetation around us, the jungle is not so tangled as you might expect. Young trees push up meekly here and there, rickety and undernourished from lack of light. Small ground palms with enormous flapping leaves slap against your legs and the grotesque pandanus, tiptoe on the teepee of its aerial roots, leans to prick you with thorn-studded

branches like the revolving cylinder of an old-fashioned music-box. Here and there rises a hillock of earth where the megapod has buried her eggs, and here and there the leafy shelter of a comfort-loving pig.

The native path, wherever it can, becomes an aerial highway along the endless lengths of fallen trees which serve as overpasses across swamp and brook and prickly thicket. Sometimes, by fortuitous combinations, we could walk a mile on end along these broad, moss-covered trunks without ever touching ground.

It is cool in the jungle but the humidity is preposterous. You are not meant to be dry in New Guinea, and not only the torrential downpours attend to your condition: everything in the jungle drips with moisture, including the most inactive human beings. Fifteen minutes of leisurely walking are sufficient to unleash the floods and soak you to the skin. Thereafter, even if you sit for an hour quietly on a wet log, the phenomenon continues. Instead of finding it disagreeable I used to enjoy the sensation, for it made me feel clean and healthy; obviously impurities in the system didn't stand a chance. When I got home and sloshed myself with cool fresh water from the stream I felt like Sir Galahad.

The proper botanical name for the wild vegetation of New Guinea is not the jungle but the Rain Forest. Certainly it proves itself an authentic child of the rain. To those walking walls of water that advance like an army with banners the forest roars a welcome. Rain cannot be seen approaching, for the sky is out of sight, but it can be heard — a thunder of falling water pounding on the creaking trunks, beating a tattoo on the leaves, crushing down the soil. As the roar grows closer, the wind, which stirs so far above, singles out for greeting some solitary giant, some massive towering tree, which, in an orgy of elemental ecstasy, rocks

wildly to and fro, oblivious of its stationary fellows. I have never seen rain move, so definite a unit, so living an organism with form and structure, as in New Guinea. You might stand in blinding sunlight, stretch out your hand and touch the glistening curtain of the rain. Then as the column advanced you too were blotted out, a solitary object in a wall of living water. The rain walked over you with measured pace and left you there to dry.

The Madik distinguish sharply between ordinary rain and a thunderstorm. The former is caused quite naturally, they say, by an overflow from the streams of the sky world. But the thunderstorm is a semi-personified and pervasive spirit called 'Nobu' who sometimes impregnates the witch women of the Karon and who is irritable if not treated becomingly. Nobu makes the natives very anxious when he is flashing and roaring through the sky. If a man is sitting next his cousin when a clap of thunder splits the air, perhaps rubbing elbows or with shoulders touching, the two are immediately welded together, flesh to flesh, an unwilling pair of Siamese twins for life. That is a minor and personal catastrophe compared to what happens if anyone is so foolhardy as to cut up a cucumber in Nobu's presence. This seemingly harmless act enrages him and he will continue to thunder, to lightning, and to rain until the water gets higher and higher and higher, finally turning the valley of the Warsamson into an inland sea inhabited only by the corpses of the drowned. There is one way, fortunately, to avoid this cataclysm. The brash cucumber-cutter, in the midst of performing the act, may chant: 'O spirits above, O spirits below, I am sharpening my knife on a whetstone, I am cutting a cucumber.'

One afternoon Sejak was sitting on our veranda, teaching me to make a fish net, when a tremendous thunderstorm

started in the south, over the village of Selenek. At the first few claps of thunder Sejak looked uncomfortable but managed to maintain his equanimity. When the storm showed no immediate signs of abating, he leapt to his feet, quivering with fear and indignation, and shook his fist angrily towards Selenek.

'You fool!' he shouted. 'It was bad enough to cut a cucumber. Now you won't say the right words. You will drown us all.'

Another time a terrific thunderstorm rolled purposefully and shatteringly right over our heads in Sainke Doek. As we stared fascinated at the wild entertainment from our sodden veranda, we saw two natives running for the village in a state of great agitation. Sticking our heads into kakoyas, we battled our way after them and found a crowd assembled in Saké's house. Saké stood beside the sleeping platform addressing the silent villagers seated around him.

'Has anyone,' he asked, 'cut a cucumber during this storm? Has anyone eaten a piece of red sugar-cane? Or has anyone eaten the meat of the wallaby?'

Heads shook in vigorous and frightened denial.

'Has anyone, then,' said Saké, 'done anything which might have made Nobu angry?'

There was a thoughtful silence for a few minutes while the house quivered under the force of the rain and the black sky reverberated with the thunder. Finally Emdur spoke.

'When we women went to the Saim this afternoon to fill our bamboos with water, I saw that Bakar dipped up some lilumidi' (a small water spider) 'with the water.'

Saké cogitated for a moment. Then he walked to the doorway and shouted at the storm:

'O Nobu, the lilumidi in the bamboo, the lilumidi in the bamboo!'



After a tense second or so Nobu could be heard rolling away, appeased.

\* \* \* \*

For all its web of lianas, its eerie greenish light, its fantastic shapes and swampy mud, the Rain Forest is a friendly place, perhaps because, though it is seemingly hushed for the soft tread of the great cats, the only beast of prey is the gay brown biped we knew so well; because the setting of lurking danger retains the beauty of mystery without the bridle of fear. Of course the python wreathes an occasional tree, and poisonous fangs are hidden there, but since we never met them, we seldom gave them thought.

Though there was little danger there was one great irritation. The leeches always ran to greet us. Dangling greedily from their leaves, they watched their opportunity to drop on us. A sharp stab, a slippery struggle, and a spurt of blood. My first leech almost paralyzed me with horror. One gingerly attempt to pull off the squirming blob which ran out between my fingers like a pinch of jelly and I closed my eyes and screamed for help. We always carried cigarette lighters with us, chiefly because matches became so damp they were practically useless, and we soon discovered that the best way to dislodge a leech was to hold a flame under him. As the leeches were always closely fastened to some portion of our anatomies this was not an entirely painless performance. But I preferred a physical sin to the moral effort of will necessary to touch the creatures. Freddy always wore boots, puttees, and long trousers so the leeches wouldn't bite him. This meant that temporarily he put them out of his mind, but he always brought them home with him. At each unwinding of a puttee they would be found nesting in there by the dozens, edging down inside the

tops of his boots. On a different theory I wore only shorts and sneakers, choosing to have my pitched battle with the leech on the spot rather than become an all-day host to him. And if we took great care, investigating promptly every tickle on the skin, we could generally scrape them off before they were thoroughly entrenched. The natives were more frequently bitten than we, perhaps because their skins were less sensitive to the leech's preprandial promenade. A leech must have some means of tapping the human blood supply, for no matter how quickly they were removed they left a stream of spouting blood from their bites, and the legs of the Madik were often striped with long red stains. We, like the natives, grew very blasé about leeches, but we never liked them.

The rest of the jungle inhabitants have more charm. Very often we used to go pig-hunting, for after a while our lust for fresh meat was as strong as a native's. Corned beef out of a can becomes very monotonous. A native who moved as silently through the undergrowth as a butterfly through the air would always lead the way. Our favourite was Skolabé, who, besides the pleasure his company gave us, had an uncanny knack for finding pigs. Breathlessly picking our way across country, balancing precariously over hidden roots, we would watch his black figure slip ahead of us so rapidly we could scarcely keep him in sight. Suddenly, like a hunting dog, he would stiffen and point, balanced on one leg with the other pressed akimbo on his calf, one hand with his hunting knife outstretched before him. We could neither see nor hear anything, but Skolabé was no false alarmist.

He attributed his success as a pig-beater to the efficacy of his 'Sawa Ess,' or pig magic. There are all sorts of different pig magic, according to the situation and the circumstances.

Freddy was as enthusiastic about Skolabé's magic as he himself, for he said it worked, and what more do you ask of magic? Generally they sighted a pig quite a distance off, switching his tail at them and presenting all in all a very bad shot. Skolabé would spit and then whisper, the pig would prick up his ears and start walking, slowly and obligingly, right towards them and, incidentally, his demise.

Pig-hunting, when I was along, was never a success, but whenever Freddy went without me, he came home with a pig. I remarked on this one day to Skolabé.

'Of course,' he said, 'no one can kill a pig if a woman is there.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because a woman's spirit is friendly to a pig. It goes ahead and says to the pig: "Men are coming to kill you, my friend the pig. Run away quickly."'

Perhaps that is true. Though I ate pig with enthusiasm, I was always secretly relieved at not witnessing his death.

Women are also never supposed to know the pig magic, for fear, I suppose, they'd give it away to their friends the pigs. I used to tease Skolabé to repeat it to me and he always looked profoundly shocked. When Freddy asked he politely refused the information.

'You might tell your wife,' he said.

One day when we were out for meat we were creeping single file after Skolabé when from just beyond an enormous tree in front of us we heard an ear-splitting roar. Freddy and I froze in our tracks as though we were playing 'Still pond, no more moving' and stared open-mouthed at each other.

'There must be some mistake,' I quavered feebly. 'There *are* lions here.'

After the roar came a slight rustle, and Skolabé moved

after it so swiftly that not for half an hour did we catch up with him, standing on one leg again and scratching his head with his bamboo comb.

‘What on earth was that?’ Freddy asked. ‘Don’t try to tell me a pig made that noise.’

‘A cassowary,’ said Skolabé, and sighed. ‘But he heard us and got away.’

We never heard a cassowary so close to again, but often heard the reverberations of their drumming from a distance. When I met one face to face one day on a path he only stared at me in silence. I stared back at what must be the most outlandish member of the bird family — a great ostrich-like body covered with black plumes from which rose a long scrawny neck, iridescent blue around the throat, ending in a ridiculous orange head with what looked like a child’s shoe balanced on top of it. I even had a chance, before he turned and walked pompously away, to look down at the three terrifically powerful claws on each foot, claws which can, they say, rip open the belly of a man if the cassowary kicks out at him. Subsequently Freddy shot several cassowaries. The first we tried to eat, but after chewing doggedly on the black tough meat we distributed the rest through the village, keeping only the plumes for feather-dusters.

Not very much else lives on the ground in the Rain Forest except for a few birds and small marsupials. Several times we saw little ground wallabies hopping frantically away from us. The natives say the best way to get wallabies is to catch them at a dance. For this I have only their word, but they stoutly maintain that every once in a while the wallabies, bored with the solitary business of looking for leaves, decide to have a party. Several of them get together and clear a nice level space under a big tree. Then they line

up solemnly and each wallaby takes over his shoulder the tail of the wallaby in front of him. In this formation they start to dance, hopping around in unison.

‘If they had the sense to dance in a closed circle,’ said Saké, ‘we should never know about it. But the last wallaby has no one to hold up his tail, so as they hop his tail keeps hitting the ground like this: thump-thump, thump-thump.’

This always delighted the assembled company so much that the men would jump up and start hopping after each other around the swaying veranda, shouting:

‘Tis u tis, Nyak u nyak,  
Serrerra O, serrerra O,’

which is what they say the wallabies chant as accompaniment, and why should we dispute it?

‘Then a man,’ gasps Saké breathlessly, ‘hears the thump-thump, thump-thump of the last wallaby’s tail and he calls his friends and they call their dogs and they go to the dance and spear all the wallabies.’

This plunges the audience into thoughtful melancholy. How good those wallabies would taste! How dull it is to eat just sago!

\* \* \* \*

The cuscus is another forest delicacy much fancied by the natives. In spite of its slow and sluggish ways it is difficult to catch, for it spends its days in lazy slumber on the limb of a tree. We never saw one in the forest — only specimens that had been shot or captured. There is something obscene about a cuscus, especially a pink one. It seems indecent for an animal to be the same colour all over, from large popping pink eyes to pink bare tail so rat-like it has no business to be prehensile. And pink fur simply looks all wrong. I didn’t like the cuscus any better than the ‘tikus hutan,’ which is so

abnormal as exactly to resemble a rat, except that it carries its children in its pocket.

There are other things that are good to eat in the Rain Forest. There is the beautiful and incredibly stupid crowned pigeon, as big as a peacock, powder blue except for the iridescently decorated comb on its head. The crowned pigeon when he is frightened advertises his presence noisily by whirling off the ground, where he usually pecks about, and lighting gauchely in the low branches of the nearest tree, a snap shot for even a sling-stone. That is probably why I shot one.

Freddy had malaria and, in an effort to tempt him with fresh food, I had gone out with his shotgun, a native of Sainke Doek, and Evart. I had taken Evart along, not for the pleasure of his company, which was negligible, but to prevent his dying of boredom and obesity.

A crowned pigeon rose not far from us, landed on a near-by tree, and sat there presenting a broadside view to me while I pulled the wrong trigger twice, looked down the muzzle of the gun, and finally fired. The pigeon dropped and the native picked it up with a whoop. It was not, however, quite dead as he started plucking out the feathers that he thought would do the most for him at the next dance. I had never shot anything but a piece of paper before, and felt unhappy.

'Please kill it,' I said, torn between glaring angrily at them and averting my eyes from the unpleasant sight.

They both stared at me incredulously.

'Kill it, kill it this minute,' I repeated fiercely.

The native grinned and continued to pluck.

'Evart, kill that bird immediately,' I said as threateningly as I could.

Evart looked at me again to make certain he had heard correctly and then slowly fished out of his pocket a very dull

clasp knife. Opening it up with great deliberation, he grasped the bird's neck and started laboriously to saw.

In the thickets a few tiny birds flit and twitter, and in the streams a rail occasionally wades on its stem-like legs. Brush turkeys dart through the underbrush not, like other more altruistic birds, to lure possible peril away from their young, but only to save their own skins. Once the mother has laid her egg and buried it under a mound of damp earth and leaves, she abandons it to its own devices.

The New Guinea jungle cock lives on the ground too. The natives have a story to explain his drab appearance compared to his elegantly accoutred cousin, the rooster. Once upon a time, they say, there lived in the forest two cocks. The name of one was Nakmut and the name of the other was Nutlé. One day it came to their ears that there was going to be a dance somewhere down on the coast. Nutlé, who was frivolously inclined, expressed a desire to attend it, but Nakmut shook his head and said he would stay at home. Nakmut, though sober in his tastes, was generous, and he said to Nutlé:

'I have many beautiful dance ornaments put away, and if you care to go, I will lend them to you.'

Nutlé accepted with alacrity, for the thought of his costume had fretted him. So Nakmut dressed him up in a red cock's comb, ruffled knee bands, a coloured breast ornament, and some very gay iridescent feathers. Nutlé strutted down to the coast in Nakmut's finery and found the dance in full swing on the beach. Nutlé loved the dance, and he loved the beach and the sea, which he had never seen before, so as he danced he was inspired to sing a song of his own composition.

'The sands, the sands are beautiful;  
I'm dancing to and fro;

The tukwom tree is beautiful,  
I'm dancing to and fro;  
The coconut palms are beautiful,  
I'm dancing to and fro;  
The many waves are beautiful,  
I'm dancing to and fro.'

The fickle Nutlé was so pleased with everything that he forgot all about returning to the jungle and to his friend. Nakmut is left all alone now and you can often hear him saying:

'Nutlé, O tesuk marrawo,'

which means: 'O Nutlé, my ornaments!'

When Sapeholo came to Sainke Doek he brought a Nutlé with him, and the natives say that the sight of the vain cock strutting around in his stolen trappings was bitter to Nakmut and he might be heard all day long calling his reproachful reminder.

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It is in the regions above, in the penthouse apartments we could scarcely see, that the larger and more dramatic birds abound. The ridiculous big hornbills congregate by the dozens and flap sociably from tree to tree, each motion of their large wings reverberating below as though the very air were rasped. In Malay the hornbill is called 'Burung Taun Taun,' which means 'bird of years,' because of the ridged humps along his beak which are supposed to indicate his age like the rattles on a rattlesnake's tail. White cockatoos scream loudly to each other as they fly with rapid wing beat, their voices as unlovely as the giant cuckoo's squawk. The whistling black Cockatua Raja with rouged and sunken cheeks like a dissipated dowager is more rarely heard. Pale brown crows caw like their black cousins, punctuating the



throaty booming of the pigeons. Particularly raucous are the cries of the shy and beautiful birds of paradise. Only to hear and never to see them would make it difficult to visualize those exquisite shimmering bodies and the glory of their plumes.

Some of the songs in the jungle are very sweet. By the law of compensation the smaller, insignificant birds, knowing the eye already too splendidly dazzled, appeal graciously to the ear. Liquid whistles running up and down the scale and haunting refrains issue from small brown and grey bodies almost invisible on their swaying twigs. These little birds, oblivious of our presence, almost brushed against us with their wings as they flew past. As we have a language of flowers, however fallen into disuse, so the natives interpret the calls of the jungle birds.

One very mournful song was a reminder of the dead. A man engaged in the bawdiest of good-humoured conversation would suddenly cock his head to listen and his eyes would fill with tears.

'I am sad. The Ndau bird makes me think of my dead brother,' he would say.

There was one cheery little bird whose whistle had a definitely martial rhythm. He was the prognosticator of arriving friends and a signal to put more sago on the fire.

By another song the memory of recently departed friends was kept alive as antidote to the deplorable 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude. One morning I was earnestly discussing with Sejak some complicated genealogical history when he heard this call and relapsed into silence.

'What is it?' I asked.

'I am thinking of my friends from Salim who started home from here yesterday,' he said. The bird called again and again. Sejak finally became so full of conscientious

affection that he hastily left me and ran along the Salim trail until he caught up with his friends, luckily delayed by a swollen stream, for a last farewell.

In the small crystal streams that curl through the forest little puffy fish, long black eels, and fresh-water shrimp live amicably together. The eel is theoretically king of all the fish, who, though they appear to advantage in the water, are less attractive in a frying-pan. I often went fishing with some of the small boys, for a woman's soul, it appears, has no converse with underwater creatures. Generally we would sit, motionless for hours, on some broad and mossy log that spanned the stream. The little boys were always breathless with excitement, speaking only in whispers, pointing out each flash and bubble below us. Perhaps because the damp seat made me wriggle and the mosquitoes drove me to lighting cigarettes, the catch was never very impressive. In fact, to my mortification, I never caught anything at all, but I was always presented with one or two miniature trophies to save my face with the Tuan.

The Great Warsamson River affords better game. It is the ficklest and most variable of waters. When first we crossed it, its entire width was spanned by a single fallen trunk. When the rains begin in earnest the Warsamson comes out of hibernation and resumes an active life. It does not rush to mingle with the sea like most well-appointed rivers; rather it prefers exploration into the surrounding valley. Like a person who has already attained his full height, its further expansion is entirely latitudinal. We never knew quite where we'd find it next. Natives who had recently crossed were always demonstrating excitedly how far the water had come up on them that day. One time we had to wade up to our armpits through a good three quarters of a mile of swirling water, stumbling over hidden

roots and tree-trunks, dodging floating débris. There was never a dull moment in these crossings, for we could always entertain ourselves by wondering whether that object in front of us was a floating log or a dozing crocodile. Frequent bellows from the natives indicated that they also had crocodiles on their minds, and anything that bumped against them was suspected of saurian characteristics. When Freddy fired his revolver into the water it was a great comfort to them, for they were so frightened of it themselves that they were sure no crocodile would dare remain in the vicinity of such a horrible noise.

If you talk to a crocodile in orthodox Madik, he will understand. Once upon a time crocodiles were actual people, though rather disagreeable ones, and lived in a house near Sainke Doek. They tried their neighbours' patience by eating their dogs, their pigs, and sometimes their children. Finally a very aged woman decided to take steps about it.

'My son,' she said, 'I am too old to walk and my legs are not strong, but if you carry me to that big tree near the crocodiles' house, I will talk to them.'

So her son carried her there and stood her up against the tree. She raised her piping old voice and shouted very loudly to the crocodiles, telling them they had made themselves most unwelcome and it would be better for everybody if they would leave that spot and retire to the Warsamson. For some reason the crocodile family was so intimidated by this speech that they immediately packed up their things and obeyed her.

When they arrived at the Warsamson, they left their mats and their baskets on the bank and dived into the water, where they became more crocodile than human in appearance. But they still retain, to their undoing, the powers of

human understanding. If a crocodile should snatch a man's dog, the man need only go to the bank of the river and shout:

'You have stolen my dog and now you must pay me for it. I will meet you on the bank to settle about it.'

Then he calls his friends and they take their sharpest spears. They creep up to the rendezvous and there is the crocodile waiting. Before he can see them they plunge as many spears as they can into his carcass, shouting:

'This is the payment you owe for the dog!'

Crocodiles were not only a menace to terrestrial creatures like ourselves wading bare-legged through their favourite haunts. A pilot of the North New Guinea Petroleum Matschappij told us what we called 'The Tale of the Flying Crocodile.' One of his colleagues landed once on what he thought was the safe and empty expanse of a broad and sluggish river. As his hydroplane touched the water a crocodile rose simultaneously underneath it and the two met with a resounding crash. Startled and alarmed, the pilot pulled back his stick and took off again. To his amazement he saw, thrashing against the side of his plane, the violently agitated tail of a very large crocodile. He peered over the side and realized to his dismay that the beast had become inextricably entangled in his fuselage. Hoping to drop him off he careened about in circles for a while, but the tail continued to thrash and wiggle in front of his eyes. By this time he realized that such an armour-plated attack must have damaged the plane, and had no desire to come down and find himself immersed in the same water as his troublesome companion. After deep thought and a good deal of travel he spied a shallow bank projecting hospitably into the river. He managed to bring the plane down beside this, where it promptly sank, while he splashed hastily ashore,

looking nervously over his shoulder for his cargo. No one, to his chagrin, would believe him until there drifted down the river the two corpses still lovingly entwined, crocodile and hydroplane.

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After it was made plain to me that my presence was damaging to a pig hunt, and when I could dodge Sejak, I used often to walk in the jungle by myself, proud of the fact that I was able to find my way home through trackless mud and labyrinths of little paths made by the footprints of pig and man. I called at near-by gardens — Kalatim, where Nayulit's leper brother lived in grisly solitude save when she came to tend him; Malakatu, the Mialin garden, which was sometimes packed with all the clan in various little shelters and sometimes empty. At first it had boasted a largish and comfortable house with two fireplaces and a raised floor. But Unkwam had spent a night there and the following day gone wandering off on some business of his own, leaving his sago roll behind him. When he returned his sago roll was gone and Unkwam was so incensed that he burnt the house down to spite everybody. The rest of the Mialin only laughed and made vague plans for building another house.

In the sago swamp there was always company and activity, for not only the Madik, but neighbouring Moraid and Moi, repaired there to gossip and to stock their larders.

Unconsciously I found myself moving as quietly as possible in an effort not to disturb the creatures around me, hoping as I skirted the trunk of some mammoth tree to come on a wallaby munching leaves unawares, an unsuspecting sow and her litter rooting in the mud, or a cassowary preening and stretching his vulgarly gaudy neck. Lying on my back on a fallen tree in order to keep my head from

dropping off, I watched the high-up aviaries and the busy flying to and fro to the sound of incessant scolding and chatter. We always hoped to see a bird of paradise dance, the gorgeously bedizened males strutting and waltzing to find favour with the hen, but that was one sight we were never vouchsafed.

There was, on the other hand, one thing that I very much hoped not to see, and that was a man shaving. The Madik male was more than coy about this seemingly innocuous operation. For a woman to witness it was not a question of outraging his modesty, but of life and death. Had I inadvertently stumbled on a man scraping his chin — and with good reason they retire to the depths of the forest to do it — I should have been faced with very awkward alternatives. The first, and I suspect the more probable, would have been the out-and-out flouting of an important Madik tabu by behaving as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. But if I abided by Madik etiquette and tradition I should have had to return to the house, cut up my air mattress, and drink a lethal dose of the poisonous *borré* juice. When my spirit had climbed up a rainbow to the sky, Freddy, to avenge my forced suicide, would be expected to borrow a spear and kill the man careless enough to have been caught shaving. And what would Mr. van der Goot in Sorong have thought? If an unmarried woman sees an unmarried man at this compromising incident of his toilette, the consequences are slightly less calamitous, for the situation can be saved by a prompt wedding of the two.

Though to us the forest was a never-failing source of interest, to the Madik it is even more exciting and mysterious. Not only are there the inhabitants that our careless eyes could see, but other presences linger there, not apparent but all-seeing, intangible but with the power to affect

human affairs. The monuments of the Madik are not to be found in bricks and stone and the creations devised by the ingenuity of man elsewhere, nor is their world encompassed by visible things. Their life is in their jungle, their kinship with its birds and beasts and trees. Between animate and inanimate, living and dead, beast and man, they are conscious of few barriers. Around them hover the ghosts of their clans, pursuing an invisible replica of the mortal existence they have left behind, delighting still to hunt their pigs, to dance and sing; human still in their spitefulness, their outstretched helping hands.

# Twenty

## Slamat

INEVITABLY, relentlessly, the time drew near when we must go. A large-scale government patrol was being planned throughout the Vogelkopf and every available man would be pressed into service as a carrier. There would, however, be few available men, for most of them would be hidden in secret places to avoid this very possibility. Moreover, the rains were now so violent that there was little we could do except shiver and dodge the leaks on our veranda. It was the height of the northwest monsoon when it poured almost all the day and night with undiminishing vehemence. There was little point in our staying on as solitary and aquatic hermits.

Before we left we made up our minds to give a farewell party. New Guinea had taught me one lesson which I had never learned from civilized life: the wisdom of planning in advance. In Sainke Doek if we did not plan on July's rice in April, or May's kerosene in March, there simply wasn't any. For this reason, our plan for a party was not entirely social and altruistic. It would be an empty gesture to say good-bye to Sainke Doek, unless we had fifty-odd carriers to transport us to the coast. If we invited all the neighbours to a dance, we might succeed in persuading them to accompany us on our two-day journey to the sea, incidentally tying some of our possessions onto their backs. We did not find



this scheme too Machiavellian. Better to be rounded up for a party than by Sapeholo's police.

So, more than two weeks beforehand, we talked to Saké of our plans. He appeared pleased and interested.

'We want to ask everyone we know,' we said. 'How can we reach them all?'

'I will send out Guns,' said Saké. 'What day shall it be?'

To indicate any date so remote from the present we had to make out a Gun first ourselves, with sixteen knots in it. It looked official and reliable. The Madik, although they love to count, have quite a lot of trouble doing it. There are always as many answers to an arithmetical problem as there are people present.

Saké sent someone out to gather rattan and the next day appeared with a handful of knotted strips. He wisely thought it would be a good idea for us to check them over.

'Now please,' he said, 'will you write a letter with the names of the people you want to invite?'

'But why?' we asked. 'Who could read it?'

'No one,' said Saké, 'but it looks better.'

Dutifully I took pencil and paper and started laboriously writing out all the names I could think of, prompted by eager suggestions from the audience.

'I must be inherently honest,' I said to Freddy in some surprise when I was halfway through. 'Here I am actually writing out all their names when I could just as well be quoting the "Jabberwocky" or making rude remarks in French.'

The letter was much admired by everyone and passed from hand to hand for inspection. We had somewhere some sealing-wax, which I must have brought along under the hallucination that I was Mrs. Swiss Family Robinson. I managed to unearth it and we covered the corners of the

paper with fat red blobs on which we pressed the bottom of a cigarette-lighter as plenipotentiary seal.

There was such general excitement about our party that I began to get the Nervous Hostess Jitters long beforehand.

'What on earth shall we do with them?' I asked Freddy desperately.

'Well, they can dance and we'll have games for them. We can give away the rest of our trade goods and some of our own truck that we don't want to take home. And we can gorge them on sago and I'll shoot a pig for them.'

Man proposes and Nature disposes. For two weeks Freddy hunted the pig, and there was no pig to be seen. The elemental cataclysms of rain had pounded the earth down and left water standing wherever ground had been before. High up on our stilts, listening to the croak of contented frogs, we sometimes looked out and wondered whether we had metamorphosed backwards into lone lake-dwellers, screened off by perpendicular walls of water from the rest of the world. The pigs did not wait to wonder. They gave up the sago swamp and took to rooting dryly and comfortably on higher land. Not one was amphibious enough to remain.

It was tragic to erase the contemplative ecstasy that had come on our friends' faces at the mere mention of the word 'pig.' There remained the possibility of filling them up with sago. We let it be known that we would offer unheard-of prices for sago. But we had not bargained on how rapidly the village would be filling up at the prospect of a 'Rami Rami,' nor what a strain it would put on those responsible for feeding not only their immediate families, but visiting cousins, brothers, and aunts. Though we ran the gamut from cajolery to threats, there was no extra sago to be had.

I went out to see Martin in the kitchen.

‘How much rice have we left, Martin?’

‘Hardly enough to get us to Sorong, Nunya.’

Without pig, cassowary, sago, or rice, we could do nothing for the stomachs of our guests. We must, then, concentrate on their mental and spiritual entertainment, always a far more difficult task. Already they were beginning to arrive. Our list had been liberally interpreted and an unexpected batch of Moraid warriors had decided to attend. Every house in the village was suddenly bursting with inhabitants. The thirty Moraid took a house to themselves and sat there proudly and suspiciously all day long. Each man stuck his upright spear through the floor on one side of him; on the other lay his bow and arrows. Plumes nodding in their neatly braided hair, they scornfully surveyed the everyday incidents of Madik village life. The Madik looked nervously at them out of the corners of their eyes as they passed.

‘Hmm,’ we said, ‘it doesn’t look very auspicious for a rousing good time.’

Finally as we cut the sixteenth and last knot off our calendar we realized that action of some kind was imperative. We had decided that the best way to get everyone in a good humour, failing food, was a dance. In front of our house was a large cleared space, and we invited Madik and Moraid to appear there that evening as soon as darkness fell.

We mixed a kerosene tin full of all the fruit juices we could find, liberally laced with honey and sugar. We opened up all the cheap candy we had brought for the children and all the cigarettes. We told Martin to be polite and agreeable, and to build a fire in front of the house for illumination and for cooking what our guests chose to bring with them. Then we settled down to wait. It seemed a very long time that we waited, for we were too agitated to remember the

interminable preparations a Papuan makes for a dance. Bird of paradise skins must be tenderly unwrapped from pandanus envelopes, preened, and arranged. Bright lory and parrot feathers must be clipped and tied together onto cassowary bones. Leaves must be gathered for the hair and artificial flowers carved from pinky white bark. Arm- and leg-bands, beads and shell bracelets, bandoliers and belts must be becomingly donned.

Finally, just as we were desperate, a few Madik trickled over, self-conscious and shy. We gave them draughts from the kerosene tin, telling them with what we thought justifiable license that it was our kind of saguer and hoping it would intoxicate them psychologically. We gave them cigarettes and suggested that they dance. Freddy seized two of them firmly by the arms and they fell into a circle. Sejak had a new dance song that he had brought from Sejut and he started to sing it. The others listened attentively and, once they had caught the words and the rhythm, joined in enthusiastically. The words to the dance songs seldom mean anything, for they are passed around so rapidly from tribe to tribe that they end up as a sort of gibberish in a conglomerate tongue. They are sung in 'Three Blind Mice' fashion, half the men one beat and one word behind the others. This doubles the rhythm and gives an effect of the harmony which is actually unknown to them.

One by one their bodies started to sway, their weight shifting from one foot to the other. Then, with a shout, they were off. The circle started to revolve, some pressing in to the centre, others pulling out again, all of them stamping with a gusto and abandon that entirely compensated for the paucity of steps. Once they were well under way, Freddy stepped unobtrusively out. Mopping his forehead,

he lit a cigarette. The rhythm and the enthusiasm of the dance are quite fun. Unfortunately the perfume is not.

Suddenly the whole forest began to echo to whoops and catcalls. The firelight touched on shadowy figures advancing single file along the trail from the village, illuminated a line of brandished spears and bows. The Moraid were coming. As the first man reached our clearing they all burst into a full-throated song, and in a leaping snake dance circled around the fire. It was a wild and unforgettable sight, naked brown bodies silhouetted against the flames with weapons and feathers casting grotesque shadows through the night. Untamed children of the jungle, they were magnificent in their assurance and arrogance, superbly disdainful of those who walked down different paths than their own. They were still unconscious of the cloud of civilization that hangs over them, that even now touches the Madik, that will one day tame and gentle even their haughty spirits.

A while later the women began to drift over, fashionably late and with good reason. Golden birds of paradise waved in their armbands, yards of red belt gleamed around their waists, shredded yellow palm leaves hung in fringes around their heads. Their eyes sparkled with excitement, their hips swayed under brilliant new sarongs and clean white bark-cloth skirts. After a quick glance the Moraid men decided that under the circumstances it was worth while amalgamating their dance with the Madik. The Madik, always affable, obligingly opened up their circle to their competitors. Now all the deep male voices shouted one song in unison, bodies flexed, and feet stamped to the same rhythm.

The women took their time. They stood by the fire, smoking, chatting, and only casting an occasional glance at the men, but these glances must have been sharp enough

to reveal all that was necessary. One by one they strolled over to the revolving circle of dancers and slipped hands quietly into the arms of the men they had chosen. The men made room for them with alacrity. Like the bird of paradise, the male Papuan dances to find favour with the female. The women stepped around more delicately than the men, lifting their feet and setting them down again with none of the masculine swaying and stomp.

Once in a while someone dropped out and came over to talk to us where we sat on the steps, to smoke a cigarette or have a drink of our syrupy punch. The children huddled closely around us, sleepy and excited. Bilek had had a drink of our fruit-juice 'saguer.' He snuggled down beside me and laid his head in my lap.

'Nunya, I am very drunk,' he said with a giggle, and dropped off into what he thought was alcoholic slumber.

Once the Madik and Moraid had started to dance they would continue enthusiastically and indefatigably for day after day and night after night, barring some urgent interruption. Freddy and I had not developed full Papuan stamina. About midnight, after telling everyone to make himself at home, we crept to bed. We lay there in the dark listening to the rhythmic cadence of their contrapuntal song. When one song ceased there would be silence for a moment until a woman's clear soprano rose in a surprisingly melodic little refrain:

'We women are waiting for you,  
We are waiting for a new song.'

On this the loud crescendo of men's voices would break in, and we could hear again the accepted stamp of bare feet on the ground.

We drifted off to sleep, but I woke sporadically during the night and wandered out to see what was going on. At one

time, though some were still dancing, the entire floor of our veranda was covered with sleeping forms, the children close to each other for warmth, the men stretched out on their kakoyas in attitudes of unconscious sculptural grace.

The last time I woke was at the beginning of dawn. It was cold and some were squatting around the fire but more were dancing. I was cold, too, and went and crouched by the fire watching the dancers turn a dull chalk grey as the early morning light drowned out the colours of the fire. Presently pink clouds appeared from nowhere in the sky like puffs of roseate smoke, and then the first long shaft of sunlight, reaching through the trees, gilded the grey, cold bodies. Colour and warmth had returned.

While we drank our coffee everyone dispersed, at our suggestion, for a snack of food and a snatch of sleep. We alone were busy, for we still had guests to entertain. Sack races we had had before, and greased poles with presents at the top, and tugs-of-war. This time we were going to be different. Around a corner of our basement we had strung a sheet and behind it, on a bench, we arranged all our trade treasures, beads and bracelets, mirrors and loincloths, sarongs and knives, pipes and belts. Four long bamboo poles we converted into fishing-rods with strong hooks on their lines. We had remembered a game from our childhood, a game appealing to greedy children, for all you had to do to win a prize was to fish for it.

Martin and Freddy sat behind the sheet. I was left outside to keep the fishermen under some sort of control and to prevent any peeking. The first four applicants lined up were two old women, Saké and the Moraid headman. They looked very mystified when told to cast their lines over the top of the sheet. In the process three of them became inextricably entangled and no one would stand still long enough

for me to do anything but tangle them further. Everyone grew a little bewildered and peevish and it took some time and much bungling assistance to get everything in order. When, after a sharp tug, I shouted to them to pull out their fish and each one found dangling on his line a rare and personally selected treasure, the expressions on their faces were well worth the effort we had expended. From then on everyone clamoured for a fishpole. I had great difficulty wresting them from the hands of those who wished to use them over and over again, while Freddy shouted questions as to the age, sex, and condition of the holders and tried to assort the lines accordingly. Although there must have been seventy or eighty people there we seemed to have a great surplus of presents, and once everyone had had his turn, the high-handed Moraid took control. Vainly I tried to persuade the Madik to break in and fish again. They were not used to crossing the Moraid, and I must confess I should have felt much the same way myself. Our uninvited guests calmly made away with the lion's share.

From this we adjourned to other games, with a little desultory dancing on the side, and a rueful distribution of our old clothes. Our climax was, we thought, rather original. Freddy had taken a copra sack and stuffed it with earth. He twisted up two enquiring ears and a snout, attached a tail, and painted on a pig's face. This object was dragged out for a spear-throwing contest, a prize to be offered to the best marksman.

The idea took like wildfire, and before we could back away the sky was black with flying spears swishing through the air like a flight of birds. Luckily they were well aimed and most of them hit the sack, but the men were crazy with excitement, capering and leaping in the air, shouting Deko cries, their faces suddenly fierce and ugly. Worst of all,



each man would dash in to retrieve his spear from the pig while the others were still hurling theirs. At least one death seemed inevitable, but the pandemonium was so great it was impossible to shout above it.

Finally I closed my eyes in despair, ruminating on what the Netherland East Indian Government would do to us for having instigated an intertribal war. I even found myself hoping that a Moraid would spear a Madik before a Madik speared a Moraid, knowing the latter would hesitate not a second for their revenge, but that the Madik might be more tractable. Perhaps we could offer to pay blood-money. When I opened my eyes I saw with even more alarm that Freddy had taken matters into his own hands and dashed in to pull the spears out of the pig. Fortunately no one chose to use him as a target and the hunters halted with spears poised, a motionless battle frieze.

'I'm afraid,' said Freddy in the sudden silence, 'that the party is over now. We must go and pack, for tomorrow we leave.'

They began soberly to gather up their prizes. The sun was very hot and they looked suddenly very sleepy. Saké stepped forward to tell us that they had had a nice time. Freddy walked over to the antlers and took down his white topee with the hole through the top covered with adhesive tape, the battered object at which Saké had gazed so rapturously and sighed over so wistfully. Freddy crowned him with it. With a foolish grin on his face he led the procession back to the village, a straight black figure in a bark-cloth breech-clout and a cardboard helmet, feeling that for the first time in his life he had attained real dignity when, for the first time, he had lost it. Some of the others, not to be outdone, struggled into the old shirts and shorts, pajama tops and blouses that we had given away. During our seven

months there we had flatly refused them these things which they so coveted, selfishly sparing ourselves the sight of the tawdry inevitable. Now let the deluge come. One cannot cover the mouths of Change and Progress and bid them be still.

For thousands of years the Madik and Moraid have lived their own way, a way that is crude and often harsh, sometimes lazy and sometimes cruel, but that has been graced by courage, by freedom, by their own ideals, and by their laughter. Now the good will vanish with the bad. The laughter is doomed to perish with the disease, the pride in their own tradition with its cruelties, the laws of murder and revenge with the dignity of the man who walks alone and unafraid, who carves his necessities single-handed from the jungle, and who accepts without complaint his own destiny.

The next morning we started for Mega. As we marched away from our house silhouetted against the early golden light, hearing the calls of the birds, smelling the damp earth sunning itself, it was with heavy and reluctant feet. There had been cockroaches and sandflies, prostrating heat, torrential rains and mud; there had been the days and nights we had tossed miserably on our cots with burning fever. But there had also been the slow and rhythmic tempo of our life there, the peace and endless time, the hard-won confidence of gentle jungle people that had made us feel at home.

There was another reason for hating to leave Sainke Doek. Perhaps it was named inertia, or perhaps it was pure cowardice. It may be that becoming accustomed to and satisfied with the simple life we led at Sainke Doek had necessitated a certain amount of mental and physical adjustment; if so, we had certainly been unconscious of it. But it was very clear that a return to any other existence

would require a tremendous amount. The interruptions, the confusion, the multitude of little things that must be squeezed into every day seemed appalling to contemplate. Most of all I dreaded the thought of the noise — the sound of traffic, the whirring of engines, the shrill ringing of a telephone, the blare of the forgotten radio, the incessant chatter of voices, rivetting and banging, motor horns and exploding exhausts. The muffled quiet of the Rain Forest had been so deep. When for two and a half years you have used no other means of locomotion than the wind in your sails or your own two feet, when you have heard only the human sounds of speech and songs and laughter, the roar of rain and thunder and the calls of birds, the thought of the clamour with which we ordinarily surround ourselves is really stupefying. And we should have to think about money and clothes and a place to live, we should have to learn to talk again when we had nothing to say, we should have to brace ourselves to travel over highways and along tracks at unnatural speed, and we should fall once more under the old tyranny of time.

It may be that, in contrast to the Papuan, we should congratulate ourselves unreservedly on the amazing progress we have made from such simple beginnings. But we found there was something refreshing and revivifying in a return to our ancestral mode of existence. It is, we discovered, a far easier and more natural process to strip life down to its bare essentials than it is to become reaccustomed to the complications we have created around us. Perhaps in every human being there is a primitive streak that suddenly, in a primitive life, feels it has come home to rest.

It was not until, from our prahu, we looked back at the coconut palms of Mega over the white crests of the pounding surf that I fully realized that a closed chapter lay behind us,

that our easy promises of future return would never be fulfilled. We had stepped down the tunnel of time and emerged in a lost world where we had recaptured the flavour of the early beginnings of man. The measure of the progress from that day to this shows that much of barbaric ways, of dirt and ignorance, savagery and superstition has been left behind. But the Madik are as untutored in the refinements of competition and cruelty as in those of culture. Greed and intolerance and the will for power are beyond their simple comprehension. Food for his belly, a wife for his bed, a Mle for his prestige, and the Madik is a satisfied man. From this basic pattern our modern civilization has evolved — a gigantic social and economic structure, comfortable, cultured, and complicated. Much has been gained and we have learned the understanding of many things, but security and happiness have come no closer to man's blind and desperate reach. In the haste and the pressure and the struggle, some of our heritage has of necessity been pushed aside; the primitive gifts of ease and laughter have been banished from our world.

THE END

















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